MISS KATE;

OR,

CONFESSIONS OF A CARETAKER.

A Novel.

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BY

"RITA,"

AUTHOR OF

"DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "MY LORD CONCEIT," "SHEBA," "A VAGABOND LOVER," &c.

In One Volume.

LONDON:
F. V. WHITE & CO.,
31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.
1889.

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MISS KATE;

OR,

CONFESSIONS OF A CARETAKER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE FOUNDLING.

Of course I was not always a caretaker.

Everything must have a beginning, and my beginning—once I was old enough to leave home and "do for myself"—was domestic service. I had been fairly well educated—that is to say, I could read and write,and cipher, and do needle-work, and turn my hand to most things; for my mother was a sensible, hard-working woman, and, having a large family, brought us up to be useful. And well it was that she did so, considering the ups and downs of life, and how there's never any knowing what one may have to do, before one's done with it—with life, I mean. I'm afraid I'm not very good at my

sentences; but it's late in life to take to authorship, though I really may say I am driven to it by loneliness and blackbeetles, which are the plague of one's life in these London kitchens, and no poison, or traps seem able to get rid of the nuisance.

A literary lady I once lived with used to say to me, "Style, Jane, style is everything. Never mind about plots, and sensation, and character: give me style. That's what makes the author!" And she was accounted very clever, and very popular; so I suppose she knew what she was talking about. However, as far as "style" goes, I am afraid I shall make a poor show; but my reason for writing this story is to give a truthful account of things that have come under my notice, and that have strangely enough formed themselves into a history, to which I have become a sort of centre-piece.

Well may people say, "Truth is stranger than fiction." I am sure I have found it so.

I don't know whether, having called my story "Confessions of a Caretaker," I am bound to write of only what happened since I became a caretaker. In that case I should have to be without a sort of first volume to my plot; and it seems to me that, in spite of all the literary lady told me, "style" wouldn't carry that book

along. So I must be excused if I go back a little bit and begin with when I was sixteen years of age, and first left home and took a situation.

It was with a very rich old lady and gentleman, who had a beautiful house at Richmond, and I went there as under-housemaid.

What a lovely place they had! Such grounds, and conservatories, and stables, and horses, and carriages — everything heart could wish for; and silver to eat off; and beds all hung with satin; and marble statues in the hall, and pictures that had cost a fortune—and all out of tea!—so I heard from the cook, who had been thirty years with them. And it is an odd thing, but up to the present day I never pass a shop and see "Try our Two-Shilling Souchong," or "Take a sample of our Best Mixed," but I see that house and grounds, and smell the scent of the flowers in that conservatory—so powerful is association!

Well, these two old people, Mr. and Mrs. Vining, had everything money could buy except one thing, and the loss of that one thing was just enough to make them discontented. They had no children, and only a distant relation to inherit all their fortune, and the property that the old gentleman had got together out of

industry and perseverance in the matter of buying and selling tea.

The old lady took it more to heart even than her husband, and many and many a time she has said to me:

"Oh, Jane, I would gladly be poor to-morrow, if only I possessed a child to call me mother." Which seemed to me a bit foolish and sentimental; for, after all, children are a great bother and worry, not to say expense, and one does not seem to have them very long, and as often as not they turn out badly. I have seen a great deal of them, and I know something about their ways and goings on, and what plagues and torments they can be. Sometimes, when I was waiting at table with the parlour-maid, the old lady and Mr. Vining would talk about adopting a child, and cook used to say she quite believed it would really end in that—they were so crazy about children.

Well, time went on, and I had been there some six months or so, when one cold winter's day my master and mistress went out in the carriage immediately after lunch, and drove into London. It was between five and six, and I was just coming downstairs after lighting the gas in the corridors and bedrooms, when I heard the sound of wheels on the drive, and then the

ringing of the bell. The footman opened the door, and I saw the master coming into the hall, and mistress—her face all excited and laughing—just behind him. Master held something in his arms—a little bundle all wrapped up in a shawl, and, as he saw me:

"Jane," he says, "go and light a fire in the Blue Room and get a warm bath ready, and tell cook to make a basin of bread-and-milk and bring it up there, and make haste like a good girl, for we've got a little stranger here, who's cold, and hungry, and tired, and we must make her comfortable if we can."

A little stranger! Well—I was staggered when I heard that; but of course I said nothing, and did as I was told; and beautiful, indeed, that room looked, being next the mistress's own boudoir, and all hung with pale blue cretonne and tapestry, and such a lovely bed—fit for a Queen—and the fire blazing up in the grate and shining on pictures and furniture. And there master and mistress brought this child, and never shall I forget what it looked like as they opened the shawl and it struggled out, and stood on its own little legs there before the fire, and flashed its big, staring brown eyes from one to the other of us.

It was a little gipsy-looking thing, between

two and three years of age, I should say; and actually, I learnt afterwards, they had got her from the Foundling Hospital. They had been all over it that afternoon with some friend of master's, who was a guardian, or something of that sort, and had been watching the children have their tea, when suddenly this little imp—and an imp she was, as being constituted her nurse, I can safely say—jumps off her stool and runs straight up to master, and looks at his with those eyes of hers flashing and sparkling like jewels, and says she:

"Kiss me—I like you!"

The dear old gentleman, he was quite proud and delighted; and so it went on, he asking questions, and she chattering, baby fashion, and she wouldn't go away from him; and at last he and mistress had a long talk, and then they spoke to the matron. And how it all went on I don't quite know; but they brought the child home with them, and there she was.

They asked me to take charge of her that night, and I agreed; and there was my little lady surrounded with all the luxury and beauty imaginable, and a pretty little creature she was, too, splashing and laughing in her warm, scented bath, and her brown curls all moist and soft about her forehead, and her cheeks like red

and her eyes—well, those eyes have done their work since then, ay, and many and many a tear have they shed—but I always think of them dancing and flashing there in the firelight: so saucy and so lovely, that they did just what they would with us all, especially master.

Well, she had her bath and was dressed in a little white nightgown—for mistress had stopped at an outfitter's on the way home, and bought her no end of things—and then up came the bread-and-milk and was set on a little table by the fire, and I had to feed her.

I mind well now that I tried my best, but it was no use. The young madam wouldn't have it. She made faces, and spit and spluttered all over the place; and there was master laughing fit to kill himself, and mistress—dear old soul—telling the child it was good for her. Just as if children ever took anything for being told *that;* and very few grown-up folks either, I'm afraid.

We had to give it up, and then the dinner-bell rang, and my little lady jumps up, and says she:

"What's that?"

And master said it was for dinner; and if she didn't roar, and scream, and kick, and declare she must go down, too, and have dinner. And they actually let her; and I had to carry her in, and a fine plague she was, wanting to

taste everything, and yelling if they said "No." But at last she got tired and sleepy and I took her to bed, and then sat up there in that lovely room in case she should awake and be frightened; and, says I to myself: "Well, my lady, if you haven't fallen on your feet and done a good stroke for yourself to-day, my name isn't Jane Watts."

After a while mistress came up, and she talked so nice to me, and asked me if I would be nurse to the child, and see to her, and that we should have two nice rooms, and my wages would be raised; and so, with one thing and another, I thought I'd say "Yes," as I'd been used to children at home, and thought I could manage young madam if I tried. But she was a handful —the most mischievous young monkey I ever did see—and so full of spirits, she never seemed to tire.

I was afraid she hadn't come of a very good stock, judging by her tastes, for we couldn't keep her out of the kitchen; and as for meals, she loved nothing better than to rush down there at dinner or supper-time, and eat salt pork and pickles, or spring onions and cheese, and sausages and kippers, and such like, which are not the victuals I've seen the gentlefolk eat —though maybe they'd like to, for a change.

And as sure as ever she'd slip away from me, I was pretty sure to find her with cook, or else in the stables with the coachman. He was a married man, and had two little boys; and there was nothing she liked better than to play with them; and oh, my!—the tricks of those urchins, they'd make your hair stand on end to hear of. But, there, what is in children beats me.

There's a newfangled philosophy I've heard of, which says that new souls are not created for each new birth, but that old ones, some of them thousands and thousands of years old are pitchforked into new bodies, and have to keep on living again and again until the wickedness is knocked out of them. I don't know if I've got the idea right, but it's very near the mark, only not so well expressed as a real author would put it. If so, that accounts perhaps for their "ready-made wickedness"; for it doesn't seem natural that a new-fashioned, innocent little soul, should be all ripe for mischief, when no one's ever told it what evil is.

But to return to Miss Kate, as she was called, for master said she reminded him of some one in a book or a play who was a regular little shrew, and whose name was Katherine. And so he named the little girl he had adopted after her; and, goodness knows, she promised to be

a shrew also at first; but she was one of those children who are best ruled by love, and she did love master—and no wonder, for I'm sure a better man never lived in this world.

Well, for two years I was nurse to Miss Kate; and for two years she ran wild, and just did as she pleased, only that I had got her to mind me, and could manage her pretty well. She was as lovely as a picture, and, really, no one could help loving her and spoiling her; and as for the old people, they were downright silly about her. If she'd been their own, they could not have made more fuss; and she certainly put life into the house, and kept us all on the go one way or other.

When she was five years old they had a governess for her; but she didn't seem able to teach her much, for all the child cared for was music and pictures. Whenever she didn't want to do any lessons, she would just go to master in her coaxing way and say:

"Dad"—she always called him that—"please Kate's tired, and the books make her head ache."

And then she would look at him with those eyes, and then it was all over. She had her way, and Miss Gresham would sort of sigh in despair, and say:

"What am I to do if the child won't learn, and no one can make her?"

I used to say: "Oh, let her be, ma'am. There's time enough, and, perhaps, she'll alter." And, strange to say, she did alter—and quite suddenly—and took a perfect craze for reading and being read to, and by the time she was eight years old she was for ever with a book in her hand, and ever so much quieter and better-behaved than she used to be.

It was just about this time that a great grief overtook the quiet, pleasant home at Richmond. The old lady, our dear, gentle mistress, died quite suddenly, and not one of us I am sure but felt her loss as a loss, and grieved for poor old master, who was like one dazed and stunned by his sorrow. And how that child laid aside all her wild ways and comforted him—it was wonderful. It's my opinion he would not have eaten or slept if it had not been for her. But there, the way she'd talk, it would make the tears come into your eyes to hear her!—and so wise, and pretty, and sensible. Many's the time I've heard the poor old gentleman telling how he blessed the day he had ever brought her to his home.

After the funeral was over, the master seemed as if he couldn't bear the house, and it was shut

up and the servants put on board wages, and Miss Kate and I went away into Devonshire for a time. It was the spring of the year, I remember, and a lovely spring it was, and master he took a small house near the sea and engaged a couple of servants, and very happy we all were; at least, I'm sure Miss Kate and I were, and the old gentleman seemed to grow more reconciled to his loss after a time, and the child was just his shadow; and how dearly they grew to love each other it passes my power to say.

And now comes one of the curious parts of this story that I'm going to write, and that made me say in the beginning of it, "Truth is stranger than fiction." Yet who'd have thought all that was to come as consequence, ay, and misfortune and trouble, too, from just their going to that little Devonshire village!

CHAPTER II.

A DISCOVERY.

Now and then in our wanderings Miss Kate and I had passed a great, wild, rambling sort of place—very much out of repair—and with no one living in it, to judge from appearances. We could see the house, of grey stone and covered in ivy and climbing creepers, from the road, and the old woman at the lodge told us it belonged to a Sir Rupert Dayrell—a man of whom no one had a good word to say. He was a gambler and spendthrift; a man of violent temper and vicious habits, and his youth had been celebrated for the wild and reckless things he used to do. For years he had lived abroad, and no one knew anything about him for certain. An old butler and his wife lived in the house, which, by the way, was called Dayrell

Court, and took care of it; and there was Mrs. Crossley at the lodge, and her husband used to do a bit of gardening and just trim the lawn, or see to the flower-beds, and that was all the care the place got. Somehow Miss Kate took an awful fancy to it, and two or three times a week she would drop in at the lodge and have a cup of tea with Mrs. Crossley, and get permission to wander through the lovely, wild grounds, which certainly were beautiful in their way, and a sight to see as the summer-time came on, and wistaria, and clematis, and honeysuckle began to bloom, and roses to bud; and the scents and the colour made the whole place as lovely as a dream, though, now I think of it, some dreams aren't lovely at all.

One day we were both at the lodge as usual, and Mrs. Crossley and I were having a bit of gossip after tea, and neither of us noticed that Miss Kate had slipped away. At last I missed her, and thinking she was only about the lawn or feeding the swans on the lake, I started off to find her. An avenue led up from the lodge to the house, and ended in a large open space —weed-grown now, and with the gold of the gravel turned to rusty-brown—and there was a terrace with steps leading up, and some of the windows opened on to it; and, standing just by

one of those windows, which I knew belonged to the library, I saw Miss Kate and a gentleman.

I stared and stopped dead short; but presently I thought I'd better go on and see what my young lady was up to. She saw me coming, and she turned as cool as you please to me and said:

"Jane—this is Sir Rupert Dayrell. He came home to-day, and no one knew anything about it. I've been explaining why I'm here, and he doesn't mind; but at first he was very cross. Weren't you?"

And she turned calmly to the grim, dark man standing there, the very look of whose face made me feel terrified.

He just glanced at me; but it gave me the oddest feeling. I can't say what it was, but something in the flash of his eyes, the cold, grim smile of the lips, seemed to bring back some memory. I couldn't say what; but I felt it. It was like a face I knew, yet didn't know; and I must say I was very uncomfortable for a few moments as I stood there and heard that little audacious thing chattering away to him quite confidential, and as if he was for all the world no one in particular, and certainly not a wild and wicked baronet, with an evil reputation and the temper of a fiend, as report said.

He asked her name, and she told him it was Katherine Vining; for master had always told her that, since he had adopted her. And he seemed to like her cool ways and her self-possession, and told her to come there whenever she liked, for he was only going to stay a few days. Then they shook hands, and I remember so well that again as he looked down at the little, bright, dark face, and the flash of the sunlight lit up his own, that feeling came over me of recognising, or knowing it.

We must have been half-way home when, all of a sudden, I stopped still, struck cold and dumb by a thought that came to me. I saw the likeness now. I knew what Sir Rupert's face had said, as I watched it bent over the child's.

It was like hers.

The more I looked the more I seemed to see the likeness—the great flashing brown eyes, the mouth so red and winsome, but which could look so firm, and almost cruel at times; the shape of the head, the carriage of the proud little figure.

My heart seemed to turn cold and sick as I thought of it all, and heard her chattering and laughing so innocently beside me. After awhile I grew calmer, and began to tell myself that it was foolishness to bother about a chance like-

ness; but all the same I wished I could have given master a hint and persuaded him to leave the place. As it was, I said nothing; and Miss Kate told him all about the baronet, and how kind he had been; and the dear old gentleman seemed quite pleased and interested, and even talked of calling on Sir Rupert the next day with Miss Kate.

And it made me feel dreadful to hear them go on so coolly about it, and I thought of the "Lady of Shalott," which Miss Kate had been reading to me, and of how the curse had come upon her all sudden and unexpected. And I was altogether so miserable and low-spirited that even the other servants noticed it, and began to joke and tease, and say I must have had a tiff with my young man, though I hadn't even taken up with one at that time. I did, not long after; but that's nothing to do with this part of my story.

There's no accounting for presentiments, and I had a presentiment that no good would come of that meeting; and sorry, indeed, I felt when Mr. Vining and Miss Kate actually did go off to call on that Baronet the very next afternoon. They were away a long, long time, and Miss Kate was just wild with excitement when she came back. It was "Sir Rupert this," and "Sir

Rupert that," and I almost thought that the old gentleman looked a little sad and down, as if he fancied this new acquaintance had charmed her wayward little heart too much.

Goodness knows what there was about such a man as Sir Rupert to charm a child; but day after day Miss Kate would insist on going up to the Court on some pretence or other; and Mr. Vining always said, "Let her go," and I had to take her. And then she would have the run of the house, such as it was, and the picture gallery, and the library, and the garden, and that strange man would watch her with his fierce eyes, and talk to her, and tease her, in order to see her little face flush, and her eyes grow big and dark; and to hear her sharp answers, for she was uncommon quick at speech, was Miss Kate.

He began now to question me about her. He had found out she wasn't Mr. Vining's child, of course; but he used to bother me, and lay traps for me, to find out where master had come across her, and I didn't like it, and used to answer very short indeed, for I didn't see what business it was of his at all.

However, one can't fight against fate, I suppose, and one day Sir Rupert called to see master, and they were shut up together the best part of an hour; and I knew something had

happened by the face of the poor old gentleman as he opened his study door to let Sir Rupert out.

Soon after, his bell rang, and I went to him, and he was sitting in the arm-chair by the window, looking awfully pale and ill.

"Jane," he says, "bring me some warm brandy and water. I've—I've had a shock, and it tells on me at my age. Don't let the child in till I'm better."

I brought the brandy, and he drank it, and seemed to get better; and then I took courage, and I said to him:

"Oh, sir, it's all along of that horrid Baronet, I know. Why did you ever let him come here, or Miss Kate go to him? I'm sure he's a bad man."

And then somehow, the poor old gentleman seemed to break down, and he cried there just like a child. And, "Oh," he said, "Jane, my good girl, don't speak ill of him. He came here to-day to tell me his story. The child—my little Kate—she's *his* child, Jane—his. And if he chose he could take her from me to-morrow. But he's a kinder-hearted man than we have supposed, and he's promised he won't enforce his claim while I live, nor even tell her the story. Such a pitiful story it is, too. Heaven forbid it

should blight the life of my bright little flower!"

And though I didn't really learn the story till long, long afterwards, I may as well put it down here, for I'm not one as holds with mystifying, and throwing dust in people's eyes, so as to make them read on to the end of a book to know what it's all about.

Sir Rupert, according to his version of the tale, had fallen in love, and married a wild, gipsy-like, and most beautiful creature, whom he had seen acting in a provincial theatre. They lived together for about a year—not very happily, for she was passionate and jealous, and he—well, his face would tell any one what *he* was. Then he had to go abroad, and left her at some little quiet place not far from London, in lodgings. He wrote to her, but she never answered, and after a time he grew uneasy, and came back to see what was the matter. He heard she had left the lodgings a week after she had been to them, and told the people she was going back to the stage—her old life. Sir Rupert was mad at hearing this, and tried all he could to trace her out, but he never succeeded. Only one day he got a letter, and she said she was dying, and told him that she had had a child, and been obliged to give up the stage for a time; but, as she hated children,

and didn't know how or where to find him, she had sent it to the Foundling Hospital, and then gone back to her old life, but had fallen ill, and into great poverty and distress, and now was dying, and didn't know if he would ever get her letter at all; but had found out he had a place in Devon—this very Dayrell Court—and sent her letter there on chance. He never saw her alive; but he found out where she died, and had been buried; and then tried to discover something about the child. But 'twas no use. He didn't even know its sex, nor what time it had been taken to the Foundling Home. And there it might all have ended, but for our coming to this very place, and his seeing Miss Kate, and being struck with the likeness between them, for, as I said, she was the moral image of her father; and, of course, Mr. Vining could tell him her age, and the date of her arrival, and it all fitted in exact; and the old gentleman, at all events, was sure of it.

But the long and short of the matter was, that he wouldn't claim the child as long as master lived, though it's my belief he wasn't disinterested enough to promise that for nothing. I'm more than sure master paid him a pretty heavy price for his silence, and naturally he wasn't sorry to have the child educated and

brought up free of expense to him, leaving out of the question that she'd be master's heiress in the long run.

Oh, I took Sir Rupert's measure, and I wasn't far wrong; and when I think of that time and of my poor dear—and all she's had to bear and endure—I feel—well—pretty nigh as bad as any murderer that's now a waxwork effigy at Madame Tussaud's, and that's saying a good deal, for they must be bad before they get there!

CHAPTER III.

AN IDEAL CHILDHOOD.

ONCE I knew Miss Kate's real history I never felt quite at ease about her, and I don't think poor old Mr. Vining did either.

As for the child herself, she was the same wicked, winning little madcap as ever. The masculine element in her nature—which had led her to associate with stable-boys, and climb trees, and play cricket in tomboy fashion in the old days at Richmond—was gradually disappearing, perhaps for want of encouraging associates to applaud her "pluck."

Sir Rupert gave her free leave to go where she would at Dayrell Court, and I think she took advantage of it, and soon knew every room, and every nook and corner of the park and gardens, by heart.

The weeks drifted on, and I wondered, some-

times, that master did not want to go home. Sir Rupert had long left, and was on the Continent somewhere, so Mrs. Crossley told me.

Miss Kate was very fond of reading the books in the library. Queer enough some of them were, too, and the things she'd tell me out of them were enough to make one's hair stand on end. She took it in her head, too, that she'd begin to write a book herself. Dear, dear! I have nearly died with laughter over some of the stuff she'd put in—of all the jumbles of style and composition, not to say the periods of history that she'd mixed up! And if I'd correct her she'd get so cross, and say in her proud, little way, "Jane, you are getting presumptious" (she did so love long words; bless her). "You think that because you keep a 'diry' that you are an authoress. But anybody could keep a diry, and yet couldn't write a book. It wants great skill to write a book—and—and imagination."

"Yes, Miss Kate," I'd say, gravely. "I know that; but I've no imagination. Only it seems to me that people would prefer to read of things that actually happened, and were true, sooner than of things one invents oneself."

Then she'd run up a tree and make faces at

me, and probably keep me waiting there for an hour or two before she'd choose to come down. She called it "breaking my proud spirit." I think it was a phrase out of one of the old romances about Barons, and Knights, and beautiful ladies that she was so fond of.

However, in spite of her making fun of my diary, I found one night that she had been keeping one herself. It was in her drawer, hidden under a pile of her little night-gowns, and I was looking over them to see if they wanted buttons, or mending—for she was a rare one at tearing off buttons and frills, was Miss Kate—when I found a little brown pocket-book, with brass clasps and lines all ruled, and I opened it to see what it was. When I'd read half through—well—I'll just copy some in here and see if it will make any one else laugh as I did.

Mind, the child wasn't quite nine years old. This is how she began.

"Why shouldn't I my thoughts confide to my Diry, as I know Jane Watts does? Who, you will ask, is Jane? She is my attendant, and I am a poore imprisoned maiden, waiting all forlornly for capture and release.

"In parrargraphs will I write my confeshsions,

for truly so they do who are great authors of romance. And to thee, alone, oh Diry! will I confide the secrets of my breaking hart!

"Sir Rupert is a mighty Earl, and great are his possesshuns; but surely an evil catiff is he also; and the people hate him with a loyal, honest hatred; and he keeps me here because I, too, hate him; nor can he breake my proud spirit to subjection.

"(N.B.—Truly thou dost know, oh Diry, that, between yourself and me, this is all lies; but that matters not since we know it; and all romancerists are liars).

"I walked abroad to-day in my palace grounds; and the knights were there, their baldrics and vestments ablaze in the golden sunlight; and one looked at me as if he pitied me—in sooth, a goodly youth. I extended him my white hand, glittering with rings and jewels, and he walked by my palfrey's side, and he confided to me that he would devote his life to my service; so I went to bed happy and content.

"(The truth of this is that I walked about Dayrell Court with Jane—but that doesn't sound romantick, and I mean my Diry to beat her's).

"The aristocrasy of this broad England are but gory tyrants thirsting for gain and war, and

drinking blood like vampyres. Why am I not Queen? Truly well would I reign, and every one would be happy; and one day I would wed my gentle knight, when he had fought for me in the Holy Land, my glove born proudly aloft on his silver helmet; and ere the year was out, we would have sons and daughters of our own to bear the good old name, and tell their children in time to come how well the brave Sir Agincourt had loved the prisoned captive—the fair and gentle Geraldine."

I had got so far, when suddenly a tremendous bang on the side of my head made me stagger all to one side, and the book fell from my hands.

Before me stood Miss Kate; or rather, a perfect little fury that had Miss Kate's flashing eyes and crimson mouth; a little passionate creature, who stormed and raved at me in fashion very unlike what I should have expected from "the fair and gentle Geraldine."

"You beast!" she cried, wrathfully. "You mean, spiteful thing! How dare you read my book? It was mine — my secrets — a sacred trust; and now, now you know it, and I never meant any one—any one in all the wide world —to read one single line!"

"Then, my dear," I said, coolly, "you should

have locked it up where no one could see it. How was I to know what it was? I thought it was only a little pocket-book."

She burst into sobs and tears, and picked up her diary, and then deliberately tore out every page in it, and tore the pages again into fragments, and stamped on them in her rage, calling me every name she could think of, or had read in those extraordinary romances of hers. And really, I didn't know what to do. The child seemed like one possessed. I let her storm and rave for a while, and then told her I must fetch master if she wouldn't be quiet; and after a while I suppose she got tired of it, for her fits of passion were short-lived, though they were violent, and she went back to bed, and covered herself up with the clothes; and, after telling me she wouldn't speak to me for a month, said, quite meekly, "Good night, Jane," and went to sleep.

Dear me! In after years how often I remembered that night! How often I wondered if the passionate, impulsive nature might not have been controlled by wise and gentle care, and training! But there, she had no chance, poor little Miss Kate, and the future had to be her school, and the lessons of life her discipline.

Next morning she was quite friendly with

me; but the word "diary" was never mentioned between us.

It was more than six months now since mistress had died, and all that time Miss Kate had lived this wild, untrained life—no lessons, no governess, no discipline; nothing but the adoring love of her adopted father, and the learning she got herself from books and papers. I suppose she was perfectly happy; she seemed so. But I'm afraid she read more romances than were good for her, and now and then showed a disposition to revel in "original sin," as the clergy call it, which proved that the little reckless dare-devil of the Richmond days was still in existence.

At last, master informed me that he was going home, and I was very glad to hear it.

The place looked desolate, though, without the old lady, and I could see how master missed her more and more, and how day by day he grew more feeble and took less interest in life; and when I used to ask him about the child, and whether he would not like her to have a governess again, he'd only say:

"Oh, let her be, Jane; let her be. Youth is short. I only wish her to be happy."

So, after all, it was not so much of a surprise or shock to us when, one day, the old

gentleman took to his bed and never rose again; though he seemed to have no pain or illness—only just to drift away quietly and slowly.

The end came sooner than any of us expected, and then poor little Miss Kate was left by will to the guardianship of Sir Rupert Dayrell, for so he and master had arranged; and when she came of age she was to have all master's money, subject to a few legacies to distant relatives and servants—for we were all most generously remembered, and I was to have fifty pounds a year as long as I lived and attended to Miss Kate.

And then came bustle and confusion, and lawyers fussing and meddling with everything, and writing to Sir Rupert, who didn't come till two weeks after the funeral.

Of course the Richmond property had to be sold, and so I and Miss Kate had to go to Dayrell Court, though I didn't like the idea at all. I thought it very odd, too, of Sir Rupert when he told me that, out of deference to Mr. Vining's wishes, he had promised not to tell Miss Kate her history until she was old enough to understand it.

For the present, he merely wished her to look upon him as the guardian appointed by Mr. Vining.

It seemed to me that he couldn't have much affection for his own child, when he could let her be under his roof in ignorance of the relationship between them. But he was a strange man, and he told me he hated children. He engaged a governess for Miss Kate, and also a housekeeper and a few servants to keep the place in order; and that done, he took himself off again, and for years we never saw him.

About this time I did the most foolish thing I ever did in my life—I got married.

I fell in love with one of the under gardeners, a handsome ne'er-do-weel, with a tongue that could win an angel from heaven; and of course he knew all about my fifty pounds a year, and that I had saved a nice little sum in the five years I had been at the Court, and somehow or other he got round me and we were married quite secret, for I didn't want to leave Miss Kate, and he didn't want me to lose the fifty pounds a year. I thought he was just perfect; but then I suppose my eyes were blind with love, for I was soon undeceived. He drank, and he was always asking me for money, and nice goings on I heard of afterwards; though, living at the Court as I did, I never knew of them at the time.

Then one day a bomb-shell in the shape of a

letter arrived from Sir Rupert. He said I was to bring Miss Kate at once to Paris. She was to go to a foreign school to be finished, and he had heard of an excellent one somewhere near Paris, and he would meet us at the station and take us to his hotel.

Miss Kate was not to delay for clothes and things, she could get them all there; and he wrote full instructions as to trains and steamers so that we might have no trouble, and sent us the money in a registered letter, and of course there was nothing for it but to obey.

I didn't like leaving my handsome young husband, but of course he vowed and promised all sorts of sweet things, and as for the fifty pounds a year that was all right so long as I stayed at the Court, even if Miss Kate was at school. So we started off with ourselves, she, full of glee, and wonder, and delight, and I—well, just a little bit low-spirited, so to say, but not sorry to have the chance of seeing foreign parts, of which I'd read a great deal, and heard a great deal from Miss Kate. But had I known what the English Channel was like, not wild horses would have dragged me across—no, nor hundreds of pounds as reward.

Talk of agonies—and that child only laughing, and enjoying it all as cool and as comfortable

as if she were in the library at Dayrell Court. But there, as the novelists say, I will "drop the curtain" over the horrors of that first voyage, and reserve the accounts of my foreign experiences for another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM CALAIS TO PARIS.

I FELT a limp and melancholy object as I reached the deck of the steamer, and found that we were close to the French coast. A very wretched-looking coast it was, too; nothing but sandbanks and low, stunted trees.

Then as for the town—Calay, as they call it—of all the dirty, miserable, ill-smelling places! And oh, the men on the pier, with their blue blouses and cotton trousers; actually cotton! Why, no English working man would have condescended to wear such things. And their language—Lord deliver us! What a language it was! I'm sure no decent Christian could make head or tail of it!

Then the way they seized our luggage—never so much as "by your leave" even—and started off with it, goodness knows where; and the

rushing, and the screaming, and the noise! I was fairly bewildered, and I don't know what I should have done but for some gentleman, who had been talking to Miss Kate—a Frenchman, but spoke English beautifully—and he came forward and explained that they had to examine the lugguge (bagg-arge they called it) for the Customs, but it would be all right if we'd give him the keys; and he meanwhile showed us the Paris train, and got us a carriage which was so high that we had to climb up as if it were the wall of a house, and then he ran back and said the "bagg-arge" was all right, and would we like anything to eat?

I felt too ill and queer to have touched anything, but he marched Miss Kate off to a "bouffey," whatever that was, and she came back by-and-by and said she'd had soup and chicken, and felt ever so much better. I suppose that was because she was a growing girl, and with a stomach steady enough to stand that awful sea, which I certainty hadn't.

Then the Frenchman he brought us in fruit, and what they called "sandwiches." Poor benighted things! A long loaf cut in half, with a piece of badly-cured ham in the middle of it.

But then, what can you expect of foreigners? I'm sure I never thought so much of my own country, or was so pleased at being a British subject as when I saw what other nations were like, and had an experience of their ways on that trip to Paris. Not that French folk call it so, but "Par—ree," though why I never could understand, seeing that r-i-s spells "ris," sure enough.

Well, that young French fellow, he travelled all the way with us, and very nice and amusing he was, though he spoke very funnily sometimes. But Miss Kate seemed to understand him, and he cheered her up, and kept her from worrying me; for I was very down, what with leaving my Tom and having grave doubts about the daughter of the man who kept the "Dayrell Arms," a forward young minx, who was always making eyes at him—Tom, I mean—and hated me like poison, because she wanted to marry him herself.

Thinking of her and of him, and of the horrors of that dreadful Channel, I fell asleep, and didn't wake till quite late in the afternoon. I felt really hungry by that time, and was glad enough of one of those loaf-sandwiches, and some of the red sour vinegar they call wine.

Miss Kate and the Frenchman were now

vooing," as we say in England; and then we were put into a cab and driven along all sorts of fine streets and places until we reached Sir Rupert's hotel.

I thought it was a palace myself, never having seen anything so grand or so large in my life; and then we were shown into a lovely room all furnished in red velvet, and with a smaller one opening out of it which was for me; and such beds, with a gold crown let into the ceiling, and with lace curtains falling from it—quite lovely! I'm sure the Queen never had a better room than was that of Miss Kate's, and mine just the same, only smaller.

We took off our cloaks and hats, and very dusty and dirty we looked; not to be wondered at after travelling all day, and Miss Kate unfastened her dress-bodice, and tucked up her pretty hair, and she said to me: "Now, Jane, for a good splasher!" and emptied all the water into the basin, and then looked for some soap. But there was only an empty dish on the wash-stand.

"What am I to do, Jane?" she said. "I can't get these blacks off without soap.

"I'm sure I don't know, miss," I said. "Shall we ring and ask for some?"

"But they only understand French," she said,

"and I really don't think I know a whole sentence. Let me see——"

She sat down and thought a moment. Then she said:

"Yes, I think I can manage it. You ring the bell."

I looked about, and at last found the bell. There was something printed on a card just above it; but I didn't notice that, and being in French, I couldn't have read it if I had.

Meanwhile, Miss Kate slipped off the skirt of her dress as well as the bodice, and gave it me to brush, and there she was, capering about the room in her white petticoat, and with bare arms and neck, when there came a knock at the door, and in walked — a waiter! I gave a scream, and Miss Kate looked astonished.

"Vous n'ate par la fam-der-shom," she said in French, and I really felt quite proud to think how well she could speak it.

He shook his head.

"No, mamselle," he said, in English. "You rang one time, that is for waiter (*garsong*); *deux foirs* (twice), for the fam-der-shom. *Pardon*—I will tell her."

"Lord's sake! Miss Kate," I cried, "why didn't you throw your cloak round you? What

will that man think? He'll tell everyone in the hotel."

"Oh," said Miss Kate, laughing fit to kill herself, "oh, Jane, wasn't it funny? How astonished he did look! and I'd got my sentence so nice and then had to make up another, and all the time his English was better than my French. Oh, isn't it lovely? What times I shall have!"

"I think he was very rude," I answered, for I felt rather cross. "I'm sure he stared enough."

"Perhaps he admired me," she said, saucily, as she danced off to a long mirror to have a look at herself. "Frenchmen think a great deal of a 'Mees Anglaise,' you know. If I had been seventeen instead of fourteen, now——"

And then she danced to and fro, for all the world like a leaf coquetting with the wind—her little feet twinkling under the lace and cambric of her skirt, and her pretty white arms now tossed above her head, now resting on her hips, just for all the world—as I told her—like a ballet-girl whom I'd seen in a Christmas pantomime once in London.

At last the "fam-der-shom" came—a young, pert-looking female in a big frilled cap, with long ends flying down her back.

Miss Kate stopped her capers and began to think of her French again.

"Mademoiselle mer dermonde!" said the girl, quickly. The words seem to rattle off her tongue like peas dropping on a plate.

"Wee—wee," said Miss Kate, "Je—je d'sire ——" She stopped, then darted off to the wash-stand, and took up the empty dish. "Ill ny—er—par der savong," she went on, getting very red and hot beneath the cool, impudent stare of that French hussy.

"Savong!" says the girl, and laughs. "Mais que vous êtes drôles, vous Anglais! Toujours savong. Nous n'avong pas de savong à l'hôtel, mademoiselle. Il fo que vous l'apportay voo-maim. Compreny?"

Kate shook her head.

"Voo-maim. She means myself," she said; "but I never thought of bringing any. What am I to do? I can never get all this black off without soap. Just look at my hands!"

"Tell her to ask the waiter to ask Sir Rupert," I said.

"Oh, no," cried Miss Kate, "I can't put all that into French. What a nuisance! Now—why, what is that idiot grinning at? Alley dong—go!" she cried, crossly, and pointed to the door. The fam-der-shom disappeared

immediately, and Miss Kate and I had to do without "savong."

After a time Sir Rupert came and knocked at the door, and took her down to dinner; so she explained her difficulties. He laughed, and told her that they never supplied soap in foreign hotels, though she was not to think from that that they never used it themselves—which most English tourists declared—but they expected travellers to have it in their travelling bags, as naturally as they had brushes and combs, and other toilete necessaries.

Then they went away, and I was left alone, and sat by the window, looking out on the brilliant streets, and the hurrying crowds, and feeling rather dull and lonesome, until presently the friendly waiter, who spoke English, came in and brought me some "dinnay" as he called it; and very nice it was, though I'd rather have had one glass of English beer than that whole bottle of sour red wine which was served with it.

And then in an hour or so, Miss Kate came up, being tired and sleepy, and quite ready for bed; and provided with two cakes of "savong" which Sir Rupert had given her, so, as she said, we might both go to sleep feeling clean.

And I unpacked her box, and put out her

best frock for the morning, when Sir Rupert was to take us to see some of the sights of Paris. And when she was in bed, and asleep, I went to my own room and soon followed her example.

CHAPTER V.

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF FOREIGN LIFE.

"TRAVELLERS see strange sights." Well, that's as true a proverb as any King Solomon ever made.

I'm sure if I was to say all the strange things I heard and saw in that one fortnight when I stayed in Paris, no one would credit it. Indeed, I couldn't put down half, or I shouldn't be let publish my book by the Lord Chamberlain, who I've heard is very particular, and reads everything that goes to the press in order that the morals of the English people should be kept pure; and, indeed, it is much to their credit, and it's a pity there's no Lord Chamberlain in France, for they need one if ever any people did.

They may be better now—I don't know. But, of course, I was there many, many years

age, and I hear that everything is changed, and they've got a Republic; and, besides, heaps more English people go abroad now to what they did then, especially to Paris, and no doubt they've done them good, and taught them it's not decent to have pictures and statues that haven't any clothing—not as much as Eve in the Garden of Eden—staring at you from shop-windows, and public galleries; and as for the brazen creatures in those "cafeys," and on their Booleyvardes—well, I can't trust myself to write of them.

Talk of Frenchmen being polite! Well, so are grinning apes in a menagerie, polite. Bowing, and smirking, and leering in the face of every decent woman, and thinking no more of standing at a theatre or cafey door, and passing remarks on you from top to toe, than if you were made of wood, and couldn't understand or feel.

It was wonderful how soon I began to pick up the meaning of words, and so did Miss Kate; but then Sir Rupert helped her, for French came as natural to him as English, which I think accounted for much of his wickedness.

And we had so much shopping to do, that I got to know heaps and heaps of expressions,

and even could put sentences together so that the poor uneducated things who didn't know English were able to understand me. Besides, the waiter at the hotel, Antoine, taught me a lot, and we got quite friendly together, until one day he wanted to kiss me, upon which I boxed his ears, and told him I was a married woman! Now, on knowing that, an Englishman would have begged pardon, and never said another word; but this French fellow, if you please, only said, as cool as possible:

"Oh, madame, but that makes it that you are the more attractive!"

Dear me! I've just copied all that out of my old diary. How funny it seems to look back now and think of that time when I was young and pretty, and could have had a French lover had I chosen; just for all the world like the ladies of quality in the plays and novels of which the French nation are so fond!

Well, thank Heaven I wasn't of that sort, having been respectably brought up and educated, and attended Sunday-school and learnt my duty to my neighbour, so I sent Antoine to the right-about pretty quick, though he'd still kiss his hand to me and make those grimaces which all Frenchmen do when they think they are captivating you. And that

hussy of a chambermaid caught him once or twice, and was so mad.

That old diary of mine tells me lots of things about that time in Paris.

Sir Rupert was really very kind, and let me go everywhere with Miss Kate, just as if I were her governess instead of her maid; and bought her lovely things to wear—much too good for school, I thought—but then of course it was all out of her own money. As for Miss Kate herself, she was just mad with delight, and thought Paris a perfect heaven, and I believe she imagined that the school she was going to, which was at Auteuil, would be a sort of Paradise; and, indeed, the two ladies who kept it—the "Demoiselles Laroche" was their name—were perfectly charming, and the school was beautifully situated and had large grounds, and I think there were only about twenty young ladies there—mostly English—so it seemed as if she would be happy enough for three years. I was to remain on at the Court, and be maid to her when she came back.

The fortnight was drawing to a close. I felt very sorry at leaving my little mistress; sorry, too, at leaving the beautiful city, which looked its best and gayest in this early spring-time. I

knew, of course, that it was not all as it appeared on the surface, and that poverty, and misery, and shame, and horror, and vileness, and crime, lurked like shadows behind that outer glow and splendour. But how splendid it was on that surface! What a world of tumult, colour, laughter, change, riot, after the quiet Devon village I had left!

I have always loved the country best. There seems no rest, no peace, no space to breathe in or be glad, in the great thronged cities. And for the poor and the workers it is terrible—always the dull toil in close work-rooms and narrow streets, and nothing to gladden or beautify their lives; no gleam of the blue heavens; no space of grass and trees; no song of birds in the dawns; no fresh, sweet scents of flowers; no shade of wood and forest. Nothing of these to make the toil less wearisome, the burden lighter, the daily task less hard.

If any one looks at life and thinks of it at all, I am sure they must wonder why such hundreds and thousands of human beings are born into it only for suffering. It does not seem just, or right. Clever people and religious people seem to have settled it to their satisfaction; but I don't think the starving and the suffering look on it quite in the same way. I doubt very much

also—whether if any great Bishop, or Church dignitary had to step out of his palace and give up his income, and his carriages and servants, and such-like luxuries, he'd be inclined to talk about the sins of covetousness and the wickedness of giving in to temptation quite so glibly. Only the tempted know what temptation is; only the suffering know the weight of pain, the burden of existence.

We judge each other much too harshly, both rich and poor. I think it is because there is too little *real* human sympathy and human interest in humanity. Of course, I'm not clever enough to go into details and arguments; but if one sets oneself to think about these matters at all, it's extraordinary how the thoughts come and where they lead one on to. I've got perfectly dazed sometimes, trying to puzzle things out, and the why and the wherefore of them all.

But I dare say I'm not the only person in the world, who's done that.

I seem to have strayed away from my subject again. When I refer to the old diary, I find that I parted from Miss Kate very low- spirited; and no wonder, considering I had not only to leave her, but face that horrible journey and voyage all by myself. However, the going back was not quite so bad, for the sea was smooth,

and my few words of French helped me a bit; and once on British soil again, I felt as if I had really seen something to be proud of, and had enough to tell my fellow servants for months to come.

And indeed they kept me at it, for 'twas a dull enough life at the Court, and some of them had never left Devon in their lives, and couldn't hear enough about the great French city, and the voyage, and the "Mounseers," and how they dressed, and the strange things they ate and did. So I was quite a person of consequence for a time.

Tom was very glad to see me, and vowed he had never so much as looked at the girl at the "Dayrell Arms," which I was quite foolish and loving enough to believe. I shouldn't do so now. In fact, I don't hold with men at all; they're all more or less bad; if it's not before marriage, it's after, and women are great fools to believe in them.

As long as they're sweethearts, it's all right, of course; but once let them get hold of us, and know we're their own property, and 'tis quite another thing. I've had a pretty good experience, and am only saying what I know.

If life hasn't been over and above kind to me, it's at least taught me some truths that other

women will be the better of knowing, and I'm not going to hold them back.

But as this part of my story is only preliminary to what came after, I must begin to hurry on.

Miss Kate wrote to me often from school, and seemed very happy there. Now and then in the holidays Sir Rupert would go to see her, or take her to different foreign places, and, from her accounts, she was always beautifully dressed, and always seemed to have lots of admirers.

I didn't much like her mixing with all these foreign folk, and was always afraid she might fall in love with one; and I thought Sir Rupert was a very careless guardian, considering how pretty she was, and how rich she might be. However, it wasn't my place to say anything. I could only stay there and wait for her to come home again, and hope that the three years had not altered what was good, and loving, and warm-hearted in the child I had nursed and brought up.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS KATE'S MARRIAGE.

I HAVE to go back to my diary again, to look up that time of Miss Kate's return.

I find that the Court was renovated and the rooms refurnished, and the grounds all done up; that horses were once more in the stables and carriages in the coach-house, and that it was all in honour of the young heiress.

Sir Rupert brought her home, and I was surprised to see how much older he looked, and what a haggard, careworn expression his face often wore.

As for my young lady, she was very little altered. Perhaps she was not quite so pretty as I used to think. She was very slight, and I suppose what one would call "medium height;" but one could only think of her as "little."

She had such pretty hands and feet, such a way of carrying her dainty little head; such a multitude of expressions that her face was always a sort of surprise; and such "ways" —I can call them nothing else—changeable, wilful, coaxing, impulsive, passionate; but every mood had its charm. And she now had suitors enough to try her caprices on.

I don't think she cared for any one. But she was a wicked little flirt, and no mistake. I suppose she couldn't help it. It was just inborn in her—an inheritance, probably, from that impulsive Southern-born mother she had never known.

The suitor who seemed the most eligible—if not externally the most attractive—was a Mr. Carruthers, of Templecombe, a place some two miles further north than Dayrell Court.

He was much older than Miss Kate; but so a husband ought to be for any girl as wilful and impulsive as she was. He was very good and very kind-hearted; besides, he was enormously rich, and of unexceptionable birth and position, and worshipped my young lady with all his true, brave, honest soul.

Sir Rupert, I could see, was very anxious that the match should take place; but as for Miss Kate herself, she wasn't an atom in love with

Mr. Carruthers, though I could see she liked him very much, and treated him far better than she did any of her other suitors.

She held him on and off for a long time. I often wondered whether she would marry him in the end; but I doubted it. However, circumstances often force people to commit certain actions which they have never thought of committing, and I shall never forget what brought Miss Kate's marriage about.

I never rightly understood Mr. Vining's will; but I knew that she had a large fortune to inherit when she was twenty-one. The poor old gentleman never thought of appointing trustees, but left Sir Rupert to invest and manage it all. Well, to make a long story short, when Miss Kate was eighteen she learnt that this precious father of hers had been making ducks and drakes of her money.

He told her quite coolly—and told her, too, that the best thing she could do was to marry John Carruthers, and then she would never feel the miss of her fortune at all.

Poor Miss Kate. What a fury she was in that night! How she paced that room, and stormed, and raved, and vowed she would go and be a governess at her old school, and never speak to Sir Rupert again; and then, just as of old, burst

into sobs and tears and cried herself broken-heartedly to sleep in my arms.

From that day she changed very much. Perhaps it was that first shock which planted doubt and suspicion where all had been trust and faith. Perhaps it was the feeling that her father had never loved her as the poor old tender-hearted man had loved her, who was lying at rest now under the grasses of the quiet Richmond cemetery.

She became colder, harder, less impulsive. Sometimes she would sit for hours in the garden —a book on her lap—her hands listlessly folded, but her eyes staring at the blue sky and the dancing leaves, as if her thoughts were hundreds of miles away.

It was one day, while she was sitting thus in one of her favourite haunts in the park, that Mr. Carruthers saw her, and at last spoke out.

Of course I don't know what he said, or what arguments he used, or how he tamed the little wild, capricious creature who had tortured him so long. I only know that she came back to the house, subdued, quiet, thoughtful; that Mr. Carruthers had a short talk with Sir Rupert in the library, and came out radiant and looking ten years younger in his pride and joy. And then it leaked out, and we all knew, and that

night Miss Kate told me she had decided to marry him because he was so good and kind.

"I feel as if I could trust him with my life," she said, "and that I shall be safe and happy; and after all, Jane, that is what marriage ought to be. I used to think a great deal about love and romance, you know, but it seems great nonsense now. Sentiment is all very well for poets, and painters, and great geniuses, who look at life quite differently to what ordinary-minded people do; that—is what I am."

Ordinary-minded! Oh, Miss Kate, Miss Kate! As I looked at the wistful face, the dark, glowing eyes, the little mobile mouth, I almost laughed.

"My dear," I said, "let me beg of you not to decide hurriedly. You are so young, and life is a long road to walk when one walks it with weary feet, and has nothing to look forward to. I know that Mr. Carruthers is a good and noble man, and loves you devotedly, but how about yourself? You are very young. You don't know the strength of your own heart, your own feelings. Oh, wait, Miss Kate, and think well before you take such a step."

She shook her head. "There is no use in waiting, Jane," she said. "I have promised to marry him; the sooner it is over the better. If

I stay here much longer I shall quarrel with Sir Rupert to a certainty. I despise him with all my heart. My poor mother; I don't wonder she was unhappy."

Then she laughed.

"Don't be such a solemn old Jane," she said. "Just as if one couldn't shape one's life as one wishes. I mean to be happy, and I am sure I shall. I have always been petted, spoilt, adored, you know; and John Carruthers is just the sort of man to keep on worshipping. Besides, it is much better to be loved, than to love; and love —that wild, adoring, passionate, jealous, miserable nonsense one reads of in books—isn't in my line at all. I have had fancies innumerable, but never really cared for any man as I do for my dear old John. And I mean to marry him, and make him a good wife, too. So don't croak any more to me, because you are only wasting your time!"

She laughed and kissed me, and shook her lovely soft hair about her shoulders for me to brush; but I thought there was something a little dim and wistful in the brown eyes as they looked into the mirror, and the pretty face was paler and graver than I cared to see.

"She doesn't know herself yet," I thought, as I parted the silken mass, and gently smoothed

its tangled waves. "Not love—with those eyes, with that passionate, impulsive heart! Oh! if she wakes one day to find out her mistake; if, too late, she learns what love can be to a woman!"

But I said no more, for I saw that her mind was made up, and I could only pray that she might be happy in those strong and loving arms, that would soon be all she had to trust and look to, for protection and shelter. Still, I could not help a sort of foreboding that came over me, and a fear that she had made a mistake—not in her choice of a husband, but in her estimate of her own capabilities as a wife.

Mr. Carruthers was an impatient lover. Well, he was close on his fortieth year, and Miss Kate was but eighteen; so I was not surprised to hear that they were to be married in two months' time.

It meant great changes. It meant that the Court was again to go back to its desolate dreariness—that horses, and carriages, and servants were again to be dismissed; that I was to lose my fifty pounds a year, and give up my young mistress' service, for Tom had decided to go to London, and insisted on my going also.

I had long since learnt that my marriage had been a mistake, but I knew I must make the

best of it. If one has to carry about an aching heart, I think it is better to be a working woman than a lady. The lady must sit with folded hands, or go about among idle, chattering folks, and pretend to be joyous and lighthearted; but the other has to toil and labour, and scrub and sew, and cook and contrive, if only to keep body and soul together, and has little time for the luxury of thought, and the selfishness of sorrow.

I had a very hard time of it in London, for Tom was fast turning an idler and a drunkard, and, do what I might, I could not prevail upon him to stick to work when he got it.

He treated me worse and worse, and I fell into bad health, and for a time had to go into a hospital. When I got out and went home—if a wretched garret in an East-end street can be called a home—I found that he had sold off every stick of furniture, and taken himself off goodness knows where. The only thing left was my trunk, containing a few clothes and books.

I could not believe for long that he had been so heartless; but there, when a man or woman takes to drink, there's not much morality left in them, as I've found out by experience. I did what I could for myself—washing and charing, and such like. Of course I might have appealed to Miss Kate and asked her to help me; but

somehow I preferred to be independent, and work for my own living.

And this was how I came to be a caretaker, and to come across such odd people and experiences that it struck me that one day I might just as well write them all down, and see if they wouldn't make a story, of which Miss Kate forms the beginning, the centre, and the end; for it is most curious the way her life and mine kept crossing, and how, in her hour of greatest trouble—but there, I'm running on again, and so I must pull myself up and give a coherent account of my new start in life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SUICIDE.

It was through doing charing for Mr. Jefferson, a house-agent in Islington—or, rather, for his wife—that I first got a start as caretaker. He, of course, had a great deal to do with letting houses; and sometimes they would be going all to rack and ruin for want of a little care and attention in the way of lighting fires, and airing rooms. Sometimes he'd get a policeman and his wife to stay in the basements and look after them; and I'm sure I don't know what made him think of me, unless it was through his wife, who was very kind indeed to me, and knew something of my troubles. At all events, he asked me if I'd take care of a house in Stuart Terrace until it was let, and as the terms were liberal, and I should have a room rent-free, I jumped at the offer.

Mrs. Jefferson sent in some furniture for me, and, though I felt terribly lonely at first, I soon grew used to it.

What odd people used to come to see that house! And I wonder how many times I've had to trot up and down from basement to attic after them, and answer all sorts of idiotic questions, and then hear them say that they didn't like the neighbourhood, or that the rent didn't suit. Just as if these were not the very points they should have considered before coming to look at the house at all!

One winter afternoon, just as it was getting dusk, a carriage drove up, and I went to open the door, and found two ladies standing there who said they wished to see the house. So I lit the gas, and began the usual business of opening doors and showing rooms. They were quiet, pleasant-spoken ladies—sisters, and unmarried. The eldest, however, had a queer, nervous look about her which I didn't much like. Her sister told me that their guardian had lately died, and that it had been a great shock to them, as they had now to look out for a house, and manage their own affairs, which they had never done before.

Their name was Martin—the Misses Martin. Well, they seemed to like the house very much,

and drove straight from there to Mr. Jefferson's, which wasn't far off, and the next day they came again and said they would take it. I was to stop until they came in, and see that the workmen did the place up, and arrange the rooms and the furniture. I must say they were very generous and very considerate; and for the next month I saw a good deal of them, and got to like them very much. Perhaps Mrs. Jefferson told them something about me, or they thought that, having been in service once, I shouldn't mind it again. But at last Miss Sophy, the younger, said she wanted a steady, useful, and trustworthy person to attend on her sister, and that I would just suit. Of course I accepted. I was only too glad of the chance, and having provided myself with two new gowns and some plain muslin caps and aprons, I was pleased to see that my hard life and worries hadn't yet turned me into the snuffy-looking, shabby, down-at-heel creature who is the usual type of charwoman, and caretaker.

At last the rooms were finished. Very nice they looked, and then the furniture began to arrive.

I must say I stared when I saw the enormous vans and the style of furniture that the men began to unload. Why the pier-glasses, the sideboard, the cabinets and couches, the great four-

poster beds, would have suited some Hyde Park mansion instead of this little terrace house.

Everything was on a large and grand scale, and no wonder, considering they'd come from a beautiful large house at Highbury, where the guardian of the two ladies had lived.

The men swore and grumbled because nothing would fit, and it was impossible to make them. So they stood the glasses up against the wall, and piled the pictures on the floor, and I had just got one room straight, with tables and chairs, when they took themselves off and said they would come next day.

I must say the place seemed even more dismal than when it was empty, and as the short winter day drew on, the great packing cases looked ghastly in the gloom; and the huge, unwieldy pieces of furniture had a dreary and dejected appearance as if they knew they had no right there and didn't suit the place, and were sorry to be in it.

About six o'clock, when I was having some tea in the kitchen, the front door bell rang, and I ran upstairs and found Miss Martin there by herself. She had evidently driven up in a cab, as I saw one going off round the corner.

"Well Jane," she said, "I suppose the furniture has come?"

She walked into the hall as she spoke and looked round. I followed her and opened the door of the dining-room.

"I'm afraid, Miss Martin," I said, "that you'll have some trouble about making the furniture fit these small rooms. It has evidently come from a much larger house, and the men declare they can't get the side-board in at all.

To my unutterable surprise, she sat down on one of the chairs and burst into tears in a weak, silly way, like a child.

"It was his side-board," she cried. "I must have it. I can't live without seeing it every day. Tell them it must go here; it must. You are all alike. Sophy is just the same—waiting to thwart and disappoint me. He was the only one who ever loved me and understood me—and now he has gone, and no one cares, and no one does anything I wish.

I stared at her. Indeed, I thought she was extremely foolish for a grown-up woman, and hardly knew what to say. After a while she dried her tears and began to look about; but she soon commenced to cry again, for nothing was as she wanted it, and it was no use telling her it couldn't be done. She was as obstinate and impracticable as a spoilt child. "It had

been so before; it must be so again." That was the burden of her talk for a good hour or more, and I was fairly losing my patience when I heard another cab drive up, and Miss Sophy appeared.

She looked a little alarmed, I thought, as she jumped out and asked if her sister was there; and then she came in, and in a little while persuaded her to leave and go home, promising that they should both come back the first thing in the morning, and insist on the workmen doing what she wished.

Presently she drew me aside:

"I must tell you, Jane," she said, "that my sister was going to marry our guardian when he took that sudden illness, and died. It was a terrible shock to her, and threw her into this melancholy, depressed condition you now see. The doctors say that patience and change of scene will bring her round again, so you must try and put up with her. You have known trials and troubles yourself, that was why I wished to engage you if possible. But it is only right to tell you the facts of the case."

Dear Miss Sophy! If there ever was an angel upon earth, it was she; so gentle, so patient, so forbearing—and a hard time I'm sure she had of it. Miss Martin had all the money,

and was so jealous of her authority and powers of management, that she made Miss Sophy come to her for everything, and only paid her a quarterly allowance for clothing — just like a school-girl. But Miss Sophy managed her with such tact, that she never seemed to know how the real working of the household went on.

It was a full week before that furniture was put straight, and then it looked all out of place and proportion ; and if they didn't cut a hole in the dining-room ceiling for the top part of that sideboard to fit, and most ridiculous it looked. But Miss Martin was delighted.

So long as she had it in the room she didn't seem to care ; and she always kept the keys herself, and would let no one else fetch anything out of it.

I suppose I had been about three months in their service, when I began to see that there was something decidedly queer about my mistress. Sometimes she was in wild spirits—almost too boisterous and excited to be pleasant—at others so melancholy and depressed that it made one quite wretched to see her.

Poor Miss Sophy—she was deeply distressed about her sister, and far too innocent and good to suspect the cause. Indeed, for a long time, I never guessed what it was until one evening, in

the kitchen, cook made a remark that opened my eyes.

"Have you any idea, Jane," she said, "how so many empty brandy-bottles get into the bottle cupboard?"

"No," I said. "Brandy! Why, they rarely have any upstairs. What do you mean?"

"Just come and look," she said, and she took me up to the cupboard where all the bottles were kept; and there, true enough, were piled dozens, I should think, among the empty clarets and sherries which were always taken down after being decanted.

I was fairly puzzled. The two ladies took so little wine, and very rarely had any one to dinner.

I looked at cook. There was something significant in her eye.

"Can't you guess?" she said. "Why, I hadn't been here a week before I had my suspicions. Look at missus in the morning; her eyes; the way her hand shakes; the dislike she has to breakfast; her irritability; her fits of melancholy. She's drinking herself, secretly, to death—that's what she's doing."

I felt cold and sick as I heard those words. It was the first time I had ever heard of women—ladies born and bred with no shadow of an

excuse for it—indulging in the vice of intemperance. Alas ! I know now how fatally common it is, and what misery and wretchedness has come of it to many a hearth and home.

The worst of it is, as I've heard doctors say over and over again, that it's utterly impossible to reclaim women once they take to drink. Men, sometimes, do give it up and get over it ; women, never.

Having once had my eyes opened to the reasons of Miss Martin's strange behaviour, and curious fits of excitement and depression, I naturally watched her more carefully. I suppose she got the brandy at different shops when she went out, for the bottles seldom had the same label, and never came from their own wine-merchant. As I watched her, it became clear to me that Miss Martin was growing steadily worse. The fits of morbid and hysterical depression were more frequent, and she began to have all sorts of curious delusions. One was, that she was very poor and that they must cut down expenses. It was no good for Miss Sophy to talk to her ; she only got into a temper, and would work herself into a perfect frenzy sometimes, and frighten the gentle, timid younger sister nearly out of her senses.

She gave up the carriage, and only kept cook

and myself, and whenever a bill came in, always declared she should be ruined, and made the most awful fuss over it; and yet day by day there would go five or six shillings for that hateful brandy, and she would steal down at night with the empty bottles and hide them away in that cupboard, and imagine, I suppose, that we were all such fools that we thought they grew and multiplied of their own accord.

If it hadn't been for Miss Sophy I don't think I could have stayed on, I took such a dislike to Miss Martin, and I so hated the sly, secret way she went about her actions, and the life she led that sweet, patient sister. But I put up with it for six months, when a sudden end came to the whole affair.

One summer evening cook was upstairs dressing, and I came into the kitchen to get some hot water. As I opened the door I found that something—a weight as of a heavy figure—lay behind, and prevented it going back. I felt a little bit nervous and queer.

"Gracious!" I thought, "if it's Miss Martin."

I held the handle in my hand and stood there inthe passage, hesitating as to whether I should force the door back or not, when suddenly I felt a damp, cold sensation in my foot. I looked, and, to my horror, saw that I was standing in a

pool of blood that was trickling from under the door. Then I was scared. I ran up the stairs and straight to cook's room and told her, and she turned as white as a sheet; but I couldn't induce her to come down and see what had happened.

"You'd better tell Miss Sophy," she said.

And so at last I went to the drawing-room and said I was afraid something had happened, and would she like to come down and see for herself. Poor thing, she looked at me so pitifully.

"Oh, Jane," she said very low and frightened, "is it—is it my sister?"

And I said: "Yes, miss. I'm afraid she's hurt herself."

Well, she summoned up courage, and we went downstairs. It was still quite light in the passage, and there was that dreadful dark stream flowing silently, slowly, along over the white stones.

We tried to get the door open; but it was very difficult, for we were terribly afraid of hurting Miss Martin, who seemed to be lying right across the entrance. At last there was space enough for me to squeeze through; but, oh! I shall never forget to my dying day the horrible sight; for there lay my mistress,

stretched across the floor, and the light from the fire fell right across her white face and her glazed eyes, and on the carving-knife still clenched in her right hand.

She was stone dead, and her throat was cut from ear to ear.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY LITERARY MISTRESS.

EVEN now I can't look back on that dreadful time without a thrill of horror.

Policemen came into the house, and a doctor was fetched, but 'twas all no use. She was quite dead; and, of course, then there was an inquest, and all sorts of horrors; and cook, and I, and poor Miss Sophy had to give evidence, and they brought it in "unsound mind," as usual; and I really suppose the poor thing wasn't herself, or she'd never have taken her own life—and in such a dreadful way, too.

The worst of it all was that the house became what the newspapers call "notorious," and crowds of people used to come round it and gape up at the windows, and peer down the area, and it became perfectly dreadful to go in or out of the door for the remarks that were called out by these idle fools.

Of course Miss Sophy wouldn't stay there, and the furniture was all sold, and she went to live in the country with a maiden aunt; and cook took another situation, and there was nothing for me to do but to turn out again, or remain taking care of that unfortunate Number Seven.

I'm not a timid woman, nor an atom superstitious, but I must say I could not make up my mind to stay in that place by myself—especially in the kitchen where that dark stain still lay on the boards, and refused to come out, do what I might in the way of scouring and scrubbing.

I told Mrs. Jefferson so, and she said she really didn't blame me, for she didn't like it herself. I believe it was years before that house let, and then only at a very reduced rent; for it's astonishing how a bad reputation sticks to a place, even in London. In the country, of course, it's a thousand times worse.

Mr. Jefferson meanwhile, had sent me to take charge of another house; it wasn't empty, but the lady and her husband were fond of running down into the country for a few days or weeks at a time. It appears they had a tiny cottage near Caversham, and close to the river, and they spent half their time there in the summer.

The lady was an authoress, and sometimes

she had to come to London on business, or to do some literary work which she said she could never settle down to in the country, as she always wanted to be out of doors, or rowing about on the river.

It was this lady who used to talk about "style." Whatever the "style" of her composition might be, her way of working was odd enough. She could only write at night, so she said, and she'd begin about eight o'clock; and sometimes, when I'd come down in the morning at six, there she was still at it. As soon as I had the fire lit and the kettle boiling, she'd drink a whole teapot of tea, eat two or three eggs, a chop, and toast enough for half-a-dozen people. Then she'd go to bed and sleep all day long. About five or six she'd get up, have a warm bath, dress, and then have another meal and commence work again; and so she'd go on till the story, or whatever it was, was finished, when she'd dash off to the cottage again, after leaving me strict orders to forward "proofs," as she called them, immediately they arrived.

It was wonderful how quick she wrote, and what a lot she did; but I often thought it wasn't a very comfortable life for her husband; and that it was a good thing she had no children.

She told me she wrote at night because she couldn't endure noise. She did not write under her own name, but had a "nom de plume," as she called it, which, of course, I'm not going to give here. She was very clever, and very popular, I believe, and a curious thing about her was that, though she had no children of her own, she wrote the sweetest children's stories it was possible to read. They were generally very pathetic, though; and often and often I've sat by the fire in the kitchen crying my eyes out over some little Christmas tale that she had written—perhaps in a couple of days, or, more properly speaking, nights.

And how she could write such tales I never could imagine, for she was a very lively and light-hearted woman to all appearance; and yet her stories always made me cry. I was very happy and very comfortable at this place, though my mistress was a bit erratic, and would dash up to town in the most sudden, unexpected way, and worry my life out about her "proofs," and things, and had such funny sorts of meals.

She used to tell me most amusing things about people she knew—"the Bohemians of literature," she called them; and about critics, and the way reviews were done; and the different publishers, and how they all tried to get

everything they could out of authors for next to nothing, and always wanted to bind them down for a term of years, if there was any probability of their being successful; and how, even if they were making thousands out of a book, and had paid the author fifty pounds for it, they'd never dream of giving him a penny more than the original agreement held them to.

Her husband was an artist, but not a very successful one, and she had to depend on her own earnings chiefly to keep up the household.

They always spent the winter in town, but in the summer they lived as much as possible at the cottage, so the place suited me very well. I think it was there I picked up so much knowledge about composition and literature generally, and sometimes when mistress was in a very good temper and had just had a big cheque, or just finished a book that pleased her, she would chat away to me for an hour at a time in the pleasantest way possible; and she lent me lots of books, so that I got to know Dickens, and Thackeray, and Lytton, and Scott, just like friends —not to mention heaps of modern authors, some of whom my mistress knew very well, and who'd come to the house, and, I must say, generally looked and behaved very unlike what their books had led me to expect.

I said as much one day to Mrs. Cray, and she laughed very heartily.

"Celebrities are always disappointing," she said. "They ought never to come out of their shells. Genius should be to the world what a mistress is to her lover—something to adore in solitude and silence—something that has its shrine and temple undesecrated by glance or touch that would make it common property to the idle and the curious."

She talked beautifully sometimes, did Mrs. Cray. For all the world like the people in books, and I'd often go away and write down the clever things she'd say, because I thought it a pity they should be wasted.

In the winter time they had supper parties every Sunday night, and generally a great many gentlemen came—some were critics, and some were journalists, and some were actors, and some were artists. The ladies were mostly literary; some were noisy and fast, and smoked cigarettes and drank brandies and sodas for all the world like the men. They'd all sit down to supper about ten o'clock, and then would not get up from the table till twelve or one in the morning. I used to wait on them until it came to near midnight, and mistress, who was always kind and considerate, would say: 'Now you

may go to bed, Jane,' and then I'd have to leave the room.

I was often sorry to do so, for they'd talk so wittily and amusingly, besides discussing all sorts of topics of the day — religious, philosophical, political, speculative—that it was as good as being at any theatre to hear them.

I remember once they were talking about some man, who had made rather a stir in the literary world by a brilliant satirical poem that had appeared in a society paper.

No one seemed quite to know who he was; and Mrs. Cray, who loved celebrities and adored genius, so she said, was quite crazy to find out his real name.

They all called him "Rex," which was how he had signed the poem, and a few brilliant little sketches that satirised society very unmercifully, but yet were skilful enough to please more than offend.

"Some one must bring him here," said Mrs. Cray, in her quick, impetuous fashion. "I'm dying to know him. You know I can always detect genius, and I scent it here. He's a man, and young, and he believes in himself and his powers, and he will do something great one of these days."

"Unless a woman gets hold of him," growled

a grey-headed old journalist. "He hasn't met his fate yet, or he'd never have written 'Delilah.'"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Cray, laughing, "when he does meet her, she'll make him pay for that scathing criticism. Now, to my thinking, it is because he has 'met his fate' as you call it, that he writes so bitterly."

"After all, they are not his own ideas," said a sour-looking man, critic to one of the leading "dailies." "The same thing has been said over and over again. We know our world; we each fancy we know our epoch; and then we think the knowledge is novel because it's just come home to us individually. Who wants to be told that our age is artificial by a young coxcomb who, doubtless, imagines that the whole world knows he has taken his degree, whereas his College and his own relations are all whom it concerns?"

"You think he is young, then?" said Mrs. Cray.

"His writings prove that," growled her companion. "He has faith still in ideals, in instincts, in purity, and singleness of thought."

"You forget," she said with unconscious irony, "that he is a poet."

There was a general laugh.

"A poet," said another woman, "is a pilgrim who always has a pebble in his shoe. He must have a grievance before he can versify. Give me a cigarette, Donald. Have Scotch women learnt to smoke yet?"

The sandy-haired young Scot addressed as "Donald" looked up and laughed as he complied with the request.

"No," he said; "at least not in my part of the country. Maybe, in Edinboro' they've learnt it's a guid thing in its way."

"In modera—tion," drawled the fair smoker, mimicking his accent, "just as they court a kiss. Do you know the story of the couple who had been engaged six or seven years before the lover remembered he had such a privilege?"

"But the crown of the joke," said Mrs. Cray, "was that he and his intended knelt down and 'asked a blessing' on the ceremony first. Fie on you, Donald! Who would seek a lover among such a cold-blooded crew?"

"Oh," stammered the young Scot, getting hot and red at the unusual attention he was exciting, "if it comes to anecdotes, one country is as queer as any other. The English and Irish are no ways behind us; only it's the fashion nowadays to make fun of the Scotch. I'm not going to say we don't deserve it," he added.

CHAPTER IX.

DON'T DEFY FATE."

It might have been a fortnight or so after this discussion that Mrs. Cray said to me one Sunday, as I was laying the supper-table: "Only a small party to-night, Jane, but they're all 'somebodies.' And I've two new guests coming whom I've been very anxious to know. One is a barrister—a very clever, rising young man—the other, who lives with him, and who is his chosen chum and friend, is a new writer. Every one has been talking about him, and I'm quite proud to think he's coming here, for he's most difficult to get hold of, and seldom goes anywhere."

I knew then that she'd gained her end, and got acquainted with the young poet about whom they'd all been talking that Sunday evening I wrote of in my last chapter.

That was one of the evenings I made notes of —and I flatter myself they read very well, and almost as good as a real book, which I hope this may be one day, though with what I know of publishers and the difficulties of authorship I'm inclined to be doubtful.

I don't think I've ever described Mrs. Cray, so I may as well do it here, for on that Sunday night she looked very well—almost handsome.

She was tall and very fair, with a beautiful figure; but she was generally so careless in her dress that she merely conveyed a general sense of untidiness. Her features were not good, and her eyes were that shade of grey-blue, which never have much expression, unless they go with dark lashes; but when she came down to the drawing-room, the night I'm speaking of, dressed in black velvet, and with her soft, fair hair coiled about her head, and her cheeks flushed with excitement, she really looked, as I said before, quite handsome.

Usually she left the supper-table and arrangements all to me; but on this night she fussed about as I'd never seen her do, and was most particular about the flowers and the lights, and that the table should look "artistic."

"People have a general idea," she said, "that

literary women know, nothing about housekeeping. I want my new guests to see that I can do other things besides writing books."

Just then the bell rang, so she took herself off to the drawing-room, and I went to the front door. A hansom was just driving off, and on the steps stood two gentlemen in evening-dress. One—the younger and slighter of the two—had his overcoat hanging over his arm, and as he faced me with the gaslight full upon him, I thought I had never seen such a handsome face.

He was quite young. I should say not more than two or three and twenty. As he stepped into the hall and took off his hat, I saw that he was rather fair, with blue eyes and dark, curling lashes. His hair made a rippled edge above the smooth white brows, and curled close and crisp round his head. The thick, soft, auburn moustache hid his mouth, but I noticed at supper that it was small and finely cut—a little scornful and sarcastic, perhaps, but no woman would have found fault with it, I'm very sure.

The chin somewhat marred a face that was in other respects almost perfect—it betrayed weakness and irresolution. Indeed, I've heard his own sex say that the whole face betrayed that,

and was only "femininely pretty." But they were usually very ugly and ill-favoured men who made the remark, and I think Mr. Tresyllion himself would have excused them.

He wasn't an atom conceited; and I'm sure he well might have been, for every woman in the room that night made no secret of her admiration, and I heard more than one whisper to my mistress:

"Who is the young Adonis, Pauline?"

Of course when they heard that he was the new author, there was quite an excitement; and if many people made the fuss over him that the Crays' friends did, I thought he'd very soon be spoilt.

His manners were delightful. Frank, easy, graceful, with no touch of self-consciousness. He sat next to my mistress at supper, and I noticed how interested and animated she was.

"He has such perfect manners," she said to me afterwards, "and manners, alas! to the young men of the period, seem a forgotten art. I wish they would remember that to women they are the charm and touchstone of good breeding. We could excuse a man's ugliness sooner than his want of politeness or courtesy in the smallest matters."

I enjoyed waiting at table that evening. It was a pity no shorthand writer was there to take down the jests, and repartee, and the general conversation as it skimmed along over topics of general or particular interest. Art and literature, manners and morals, religion and science, all came in for a fair share of discussion; but so rapidly and brilliantly did the ball fly from one to another that I could not possibly do justice to the speakers, so I must let the task alone.

I remember hearing Mrs. Cray saying something to Mr. Tresyllion about his much discussed poem "Delilah." She was leaning back in her chair, the light falling softly from the rose-shaded lamps on her fair, flushed face and animated eyes.

He looked at her admiringly as she spoke; her voice low, eager, rapid, as if the subject interested and engrossed her.

"You pay me the compliment of having understood, as well as read my sketch," he said at last. "I think you are the first woman who has done that. I'm sorry we don't agree though about the ending."

"It was so merciless," she said. "And I should not think you were hard, or cruel of nature. You are too young to have had such an

experience as you depict. From whence, then, did you draw it?"

"Imagination, of course," he said. "You surely do not mean to say that one must go only to experience for the truths of life? I have read your books, and when I look at you——"

"Don't," she said, laughing a little. "I've heard that so often. They are so tragic, and I—so—very much the opposite. Just as if one doesn't write by intuition. As if one's own surface views were everything. Perhaps it is because my own nature is light, that I love to depict tragedy; because I can laugh and jest with such ease, that I turn to my pictured sorrows as a relief."

"I should not think your nature was light—far from it," he said gravely; and I saw their eyes meet, and a quick hot flush flamed in her cheek as her glance drew itself slowly and reluctantly away. For a moment they were silent. Then suddenly she bent a little nearer to him. "Tell me," she said softly, "why you wrote 'Delilah.' Didn't you feel her sex would look upon it as a sort of public challenge?"

"No," he said, evidently surprised. "I wrote it because I felt it. As a picture of the woman who laughs and jests, and cheats her lover, and

takes all life can give, and to whom Death means—the end. What else could it be to such a woman? What has she in common with heaven or hell? She is absolutely soulless, absolutely irresponsible. She loved; but love was a jest. Even so must be her eternity."

"Oh," said Mrs. Cray with a little shiver, "that is horribly cynical. You speak as if she had been a dead butterfly, a pretty insect created but for an hour of sunlight and summer. And you are such a boy—it is not right. Has no woman taught you better than that?"

"No," he said briefly; "I don't think any woman ever will."

Just for a second's space she lifted her eyes from the grapes on her plate, and flashed one look at the beautiful, boyish face.

"Don't defy fate," she said softly. "You may live to repent it, as others have done before you."

"You mean," he said, "there are women and —women. Yes, I know; but most of them are the type of my Delilah—sleek, soft, caressing—ready to love if love be of fair promise; a summer day's idyl; utterly incapable of facing a storm, an adverse wind, a breath of trouble, or disappointment."

"You will tell me a different tale some day," she said, lightly. "You are young yet—a tyro in love's arts. Wait and see what fate has in store for you."

"I mean to," he said, laughing gaily. "I am in no hurry, I assure you, to taste of the 'bitter reality' that love is to life, according to your books."

"You seem to know them very well," she said, with evident gratification. "Have I really said that?"

"Yes, I know them all very well. I can't tell you how pleased I felt when my friend Grant told me he would bring me here to-night. I had so often wondered what you were like?"

"And am I what you supposed?"

"No," he said. "Somehow, I always pictured you dark, small, rather sad-looking—'a woman with a history' sort of face."

"Ah," she said, shortly; "I always say it is a mistake to draw fancy portraits of people from their works, of whatever kind. One is always disillusioned rapidly when one sees the originals."

"Pardon me," he said, "I never surely conveyed—that."

Again their eyes met, again she laughed, but

there was a constrained ring about the usually clear note of her merriment.

I did not like to hear it; I did not like the interest she betrayed so openly, and yet so unconsciously.

She scarcely looked at or spoke to any one else that whole evening. She seemed perfectly engrossed with this young poet.

When the supper-party broke up they went into the drawing-room, and I heard music and singing, and one voice struck me particularly. Indeed, I sat at the foot of the stairs and listened out of sheer delight.

Mrs. Cray told me next day it was Rex Tresyllion who had sung. She called him that quite naturally. I think he was one of those men to whose name very few people affix "Mr."

She spoke of him a good deal. "He is very clever," she said. "I wonder what he will do with his life; or rather"—and she laughed a little bitterly—"what women will do with it for him. That is more to the point. He is just of the temperament to suffer. Passionate, poetic, impulsive, wilful—and with that face," she added softly.

"You seem to admire his looks, ma'am," I said. "Take care, or you will make him conceited."

She looked at me sharply.

"I always study faces," she said, "especially if they describe well. Besides, they are an index to character."

"If Mr. Tresyllion's character is as good as his looks," I said, "he must be very perfect indeed."

"Oh, he's not—that," she said quickly. "I should think he has plenty of faults."

Then she left the room and went up the stairs, singing softly to herself the air of that little Italian song which Mr. Tresyllion had sung the previous night.

CHAPTER X.

A FIRST MEETING.

After that Sunday night Mr. Tresyllion seemed to be constantly at the house, and he and Mrs. Cray became great friends.

She always spoke of him as a boy; and, considering that she was thirty-two and he twenty-three, it was excusable, and seemed to account for her interest in him, and her growing predilection for his society. His manner to her was always the same—frank, cordial, admiring; but with nothing to express any greater warmth of interest than that of an affectionate younger brother.

They had a great deal in common—their pursuits, their tastes, their love of art, their Bohemian tendencies and dislike to anything like conventionality.

I think the young fellow began to look upon the little house in Bruton Street as a sort of home—a place where he was always welcome, and never in the way. He liked the little suppers, all light, and wit, and sparkle; and the boxes at the theatre, where he almost always made the third or fourth to her parties; and the discussions of new books, and the meeting with new authors, who came perpetually to those Sunday gatherings.

But he did not see what I saw, how excited and feverish Mrs. Cray was becoming; how irritable in moods and temper; how discontented and cynical about life; how hard to please; how averse to the society of women younger, fairer, more calculated to excite admiration than herself.

She had sprung into wider popularity than ever, and had made such a large sum of money out of her last book that she was able to give herself a rest for a time—breathing-space, she called it.

The spring glided into summer, and the river-parties and picnics began; but she was in town much oftener than she had been the previous season, and seemed to go more into society; and sometimes she'd laugh and show me the papers where she was described as "the beau-

tiful and talented authoress of 'So-and-So,'" and where they had put how she was dressed.

She had never cared about gowns before; but she did now, and I knew that Mr. Tresyllion often designed them for her, as far as colour and effect went; and lovely some of them were. And another thing I know Mr. Tresyllion had told her was about her light eyelashes, for she took to touching them up at night; and, as she did it very lightly and artistically, the effect was really very good, and gave her quite a different expression.

Once or twice I've heard Rex Tresyllion tell her she "looked lovely;" and I used to think it was rather a shame, though he may have meant no harm. But she'd sit and dream there, before the glass, for all the world like a young girl of seventeen; and I'm sure 'twas only over what he had said.

I dare say he was used to making those sort of speeches to women. They seemed to come too naturally and gracefully from his lips, to be deep-felt or sincere.

I wondered sometimes if Mr. Cray noticed any difference in his wife. He was a lazy, easy-tempered man, and a very good husband, and never interfered with her in any way. But I often thought that if I were a husband, I

wouldn't like to have a young, good-looking fellow like Rex Tresyllion quite so much with my wife.

One evening there was to be a rather large party at Bruton Street. An "omnium gatherum," Mrs. Cray called it. There was a grand supper, and the whole house turned upside down.

I was to attend to the tea and coffee, and I thought it would be great fun, as I should see every one, and all the dresses, and hear all their talk.

I think it must have been about ten o'clock when two ladies walked into the tea-room.

I started as I saw the smaller and slighter of the two come up to the table.

"Why, good gracious!" I cried out, forgetting manners and everything else. "If it isn't Miss Kate!"

"Jane!" she exclaimed; and then, grand lady as she was, it was just her old pretty, impulsive self, wringing my hands, and laughing, and chattering away. "Oh, my dear, dear old Jane!" she went on. Where have you hidden yourself all this time? I have so often wondered what had become of you. Why, it's years and years, isn't it, since we saw each other? And I've got two boys now. You must come and see them, Jane; such jolly little

chaps; always in mischief. Marcia, my dear," she went on, turning to her friend, who was looking on in surprise, "this is my old nurse, whom I've lost sight of for years. She's married, and I'm married. But oh, Jane," and she laughed again, "what fun we had once! Oh, the dear old days of 'make believe,' when we both kept diaries! Do you remember, Jane? And when we went to Paris. Dear me! what ages ago it seems! And what brings you into service again? The idea! Why, I thought you and Tom were flourishing and prosperous all this time!"

"I've had a deal of trouble, Miss Kate," I said, handing her the tea she had asked for; "but then, we all must have our share sooner or later. I've managed to get along very well, thank Heaven, and have never wanted for friends; and I like hard work, it keeps me from brooding too much over worries."

"You ought to have written to me, and to have told me," she said, reproachfully. "I'd have taken you willingly into my service."

"I didn't like to trouble you," I said. "But I'm so pleased to see you again. And oh, Miss Kate, how pretty you've grown! No need, I'm sure, to ask if you're well and happy?"

"I look both, you think," she said, with an

odd little smile just touching her soft red lips. She lifted her eyes as she spoke, and looked straight before her into the glass over the mantelpiece. She gave a little start, and half turned round. Following her glance, I saw Mr. Rex Tresyllion leaning carelessly against the door. I don't know how long he had been there; but doubtless he had heard some of the conversation, judging from the amused expression in his eyes.

He looked the very picture of lazy, careless content; and handsomer than ever, I thought, as he sauntered over to the table and asked for coffee, which I gave him.

Then a voice said:

"Have you forgotten me, Mr. Tresyllion?" and Miss Kate's friend came forward and held out her hand. He put down his cup.

"Mrs. Ellerton! Well, this is a surprise," he said, shaking hands warmly with her. "I thought you had eschewed the gaieties of London for ever."

"Oh, no!" she said. "I tried it for a time; but you see what slaves of the treadmill we are. However much we rail against it, we still like to do our day's work, and won't be excused."

"Is your husband with you?"

"Not to-night. I am chaperoning this young

lady. Let me introduce you, by-the-bye. Kate, this is Mr. Rex Tresyllion, whom you know by repute, and whom I knew as a school-boy—Rex, Mrs. Carruthers."

They bowed. There was one quick glance of mutual interest, an interchange of ordinary phrases, such as I had heard a dozen times before on that evening, and—that was all.

Ordinary enough, simple enough, innocent enough, but, oh, my dear, if I could have seen what that meeting was to bring about—if I could have looked forward, but a few years, into that future which had seemed so safe and happy a one for you until—that night!

They all went upstairs to the drawing-room, and I saw no more of them till some two hours later, when Mr. Tresyllion brought her down for an ice. There was no one else in the room, and they sat down on a low cushioned lounge just behind the door. Miss Kate (I shall never be able to call her anything else, so it's no use trying) ate her ice, and he—looked at her.

I don't wonder at it. I don't see how any man could help it. She mightn't have been actually beautiful, but the changeful, brilliant little face, the great, deep, velvety eyes, the childish, pouting mouth, the grace of the dainty

little figure, so softly draped and gowned in deep red, the colour of geranium blossoms, that made her dusky hair, and creamy skin, and glowing eyes stand out in rich relief—well, to my eyes, there was no one there that night worth looking at beside her, and a good many of the gentlemen seemed of my opinion. I thought she was an arrant little flirt; but there, it was just her way. Marriage hadn't changed her, nor motherhood either, and it's my belief that nothing could, or would. She was bound to charm, and she really couldn't help herself, and she was so young, and so pretty.

It seemed ridiculous to think of her as being a married woman. I don't think Mr. Tresyllion did at all. His manner certainly never seemed to say so.

It was delightful to hear them talk; I can't remember half they said, but I never saw two people get on better on such short aquaintance. It reminded me of two streams—now touching, now parting, now running side by side, now quiet and earnest, the next moment rippling and dancing for sheer delight of movement and companionship. Of course, they talked about his book; and for the first time in my experience he spoke of it deprecatingly. Miss Kate took up the cudgels for her sex, and I

certainly think she had the best of it. But she took such an innocent, high-souled view of womanhood, that no man could have had the heart to undeceive her.

Certainly Mr. Tresyllion had not, for I heard him say, as he gave her his arm to return to the drawing-room:

"Had I known you two years ago, 'Delilah' would never have been written."

I heard it, and I looked at the two young figures—the two beautiful, glowing, youthful faces, and, for one moment, a sort of regret seemed to touch my heart, and I thought what a pity Miss Kate had been in such a hurry to marry. For I knew there had been no question of love—no sentiment whatever about it; and if ever a day should come when she would know the force, and strength, and tempting of passion, what safeguard would memory have for her, or duty either?

The childish nature was but little altered. The spoilt, wilful, capricious, little beauty of to-night was not so very far removed from that impulsive young charge of mine, who would box my ears one moment and cry with penitence the next.

And again, as I saw the soft, red skirts flutter up the dimly-lighted staircase, I sighed to myself: "Oh Miss Kate! Miss Kate!"

Once again that night I heard and saw those two. I was near the door of the supper-room. They were standing looking on.

"No room yet," said Mr. Tresyllion. "Let us wait. Come and sit down here."

I heard the ripple of Miss Kate's pretty laughter. "You seem to have an affection for dark corners and staircases," she said. "Is this the way you generally behave at parties? If so, your hostess must find you an extremely useful person."

"You ought not to blame me," he said softly, "for you are both cause and excuse of my uselessness to-night. Come and sit down! I want to talk to you. I thought I should never get a chance. You've been so surrounded."

Now I'm not, of course, aware of the way gentlemen talk to ladies at parties, but I certainly thought this was rather bold and rather strange, too, considering that Miss Kate was married.

But, perhaps, he never thought of that, and her husband wasn't there to remind him; and, as I said before, of all the audacious little flirts——

They came into the supper-room some half-hour later and found a small table unoccupied, and they seemed to enjoy themselves very much

indeed, and laughted and jested and talked away for all the world like a couple of children. But I saw what they didn't, that Mrs. Cray's blue eyes were flashing dire wrath in their direction, and that an expression of acute anguish crossed her face for one unguarded moment, as she noted that fair head with its close, soft curls, bent down so near the pretty flushed face and sparkling eyes of her stranger guest. For Miss Kate had never seen her till to-night, and had only come at her friend, Mrs. Ellerton's, invitation.

The two women were a great contrast to one another, and there was little doubt who had the best of it. Youth—beauty— wit—audacity; and yet withal the innocence and fearlessness of a nature the world had not sullied, and society had not spoiled. That was how Mrs. Cray summed up her rival, for I saw it written down the next day on one of her fragments of paper headed "Notes for new Novel," and underneath was scrawled in a fierce, impulsive, almost illegible hand:

"I hate her! Fate tells me that she will bring evil into my life.

CHAPTER XI.

"CROSS, PAULINE?"

"JANE," said Mrs. Cray abruptly the next morning, as she was helping me put away the silver and glass, "how long is it since you left Mrs. Carruthers?"

"I left her when she married, ma'am," I answered. "I had been her nurse, and then her maid; but I married before she did, and when she left Dayrell Court for her new home, my husband wished me to leave service and go with him to London."

"Was she—was she very much attached to her husband?" asked my mistress, in a hesitating sort of way, turning a tiny Venetian flower-glass over and over in her hand as she spoke.

"I believe so," I answered. "He was a great deal older than herself; but such a good, kind-hearted man, devotedly fond of her."

"She is very pretty," said Mrs. Cray, putting

the glass down abruptly. "A great flirt, I should think. It's to be hoped Mr. Carruthers is not a jealous man. Elderly husbands are, as a rule."

"Do you think, ma'am," I said, "there's any rule about it? Isn't it more a matter of temperament and disposition?

"You are getting quite a student of character, Jane," she said, with a faint smile. "That comes of my Sunday suppers. I always say they're a 'liberal education.'"

She sat down abruptly, and leaned her head on her hands, her elbows on the table.

"I'm very tired," she said, with a sigh. "I wish I hadn't given that party. I wonder why we entertain people we don't care a straw about, and who certainly don't care a straw about us? It is so senseless! A waste of time, a waste of money, a waste of feeling, a trial to one's nerves and temper. Good heavens, what a world of fools this is!"

I went on quietly washing the fragile glass, and did not answer. I saw that she was put out, and I guessed the reason. I began to think of my French experiences, and to wonder if Englishmen were coming round to Antoine's opinion—"To be married; but that makes it that you are the more attractive."

Modern novels seemed to say so; modern plays also, with their breaches of the seventh commandment as the only pivot of an exciting plot.

"We have no friends nowadays — only acquaintances," Mrs. Cray went on presently, pushing the thick, fair hair off her brow with an impatient gesture. "I know hundreds of people, and I suppose that I am known by thousands; yet, if I died to-morrow, there is not one who would really care—not one who would shed a tear of genuine sorrow. Not one woman, certainly. Bah! I hate women. The young ones are such simpering, doll-faced idiots; the elder ones such spiteful, canting hypocrites. I don't believe they've a genuine feeling or emotion left in their hearts. Society, pleasure, dress, vanity, extravagance—that is their life—nothing deeper, nothing greater, nothing better; and yet there are still men who believe in them."

"Perhaps," I said, "it is because here and there a good wife—a good mother—a woman who knows what is due to womanhood, saves the rest of her sex from being utterly condemned."

She lifted her head and looked at me. "When you find such a woman," she said, bitterly, "I

wish you would let me know. I will make her a 'character,' and introduce her to an ideal world, and call it a 'Study from Life.' I confess I have never come across such a being. I don't know why you should be more fortunate; unless it is that virtue has been so effectually routed out from the bosoms that beat beneath silks and laces, that she has fled in utter despair, and taken refuge in the more homely retreats of calico and homespun." Then she arose and began to assist me again in a mechanical, absent-minded fashion.

"Your late mistress is a very great lady now," she said, presently. "Her husband is a Member of Parliament. They are very rich. I asked her to call on me, but I don't suppose she will. I am only a humble, working bee, and she—one of society's butterflies."

"I don't think Miss Kate has any nonsense about her," I said, warmly. "She was always affectionate, and impulsive, and generous. I am sure society has not spoilt her."

"Society spoils every one," said Mrs. Cray, sharply. "It is a forcing-house, where nothing natural and simple can possibly thrive."

"Miss Kate is just what she always was," I repeated, doggedly. "Just as sincere, as bright, as fascinating, as innocent."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mrs. Cray contemptuously, "ignorance is not innocence. This is her first season. She has lived abroad, or with her babies and flowers, and horses, buried in the country. Now she has come to London ready for all that society can give her. We will see what that will be, and how well she appreciates the gifts."

"You don't seem to like her, ma'am," I said, quietly.

She started, and coloured a little.

"Not like her? What nonsense! I am only analysing her character and its possibilities. I like her as well as I like—any woman. Certainly that is not much. I like men, because, with all their faults, I think they are more genuine. Now and then they *are* incapable of a lie, and can be loyal to a woman even if they don't love her. They don't fuss, they don't pretend; they generally even prefer us to think they have too little feeling rather than too much; but for all their indifference and indolence, and contempt for emotion and jests at sentiment, where is the woman who can match them for patience, for bravery, for honour, for loyal thought and memory? I confess I have never found such a one, and I have had a pretty wide experience of both sexes."

I was silent. I did not feel qualified to give an opinion of men and women in general having had only a limited sphere of observation; whereas Mrs. Cray—being a clever woman, and a writer, and a student of character—doubtless had made it her business to know all about them and their ways.

Of course I knew perfectly well why Mrs. Cray was talking to me like this, as well as I knew why she was always now so restless and dissatisfied, so particular about her gowns, and so constantly contrasting herself with younger women. Hadn't I seen her eyes devouring that fair, handsome, careless face of Rex Tresyllion's; hadn't I seen her flush and pale like a schoolgirl when he entered the room suddenly, or came across to speak to her, with that show of preference for her society and conversation which had done so much harm?

I don't know whether he himself had remarked it, but I suppose he was no blinder than most young, good-looking fellows; and Mrs. Cray certainly made little secret of her liking for him. But it was only when jealousy had sharpened her feelings that she betrayed how far her infatuation had gone.

I watched her face with its stormy changes; her restlessness as she moved to and fro the

room with that pretence of assisting me; and I knew that in her mind she was going over the events of that brief intimacy, feeding her hopes again on every trivial word or expression of interest that had ever fallen from his lips.

I knew nothing of her previous life—whether it had been hard or peaceful—broken by sorrow, or embittered by disappointment. I only knew her as the somewhat erratic woman I have described, a woman with whom I should have thought the feelings were always subordinate to the intellect, certainly not one who would wreck her life and her future for the sake of a romantic and rather senseless fancy.

But there, I believe there's no knowing really what a woman will do. Anything and everything except just what you expect of her!

We were still engaged in the work of clearing the dining-room, when the visitors' bell rang. I went to the door and saw Mr. Tresyllion standing there.

"Is your mistress in?" he asked; and when I said "Yes," he just followed me into the room as cool as if he belonged to the family.

She received him rather coldly; being, indeed, so much on her guard and on her dignity that I was rather surprised.

He seated himself on the edge of the table, just for all the world like a schoolboy.

"What are you doing, Jane?" he said; "washing up? Let me help you."

"No, thank you, sir," I said, laughing in spite of myself. "These glasses are far too brittle and delicate for men's fingers."

He glanced at Mrs. Cray, who was wiping them with a damask napkin as fast as I washed them.

"It was a great success last night, Pauline, wasn't it?" he said.

Almost every one who came there called my mistress Pauline, and I suppose he had dropped into the way of it.

"Do you think so?" she said, coldly. "One can never quite tell—oneself. But I suppose it went off as well as most parties."

"I enjoyed myself hugely," he went on, swinging his foot to and fro, and looking at the neat patent leather shoes with a contented little smile, as if he had some pleasant memory in his mind.

"Any one could see that," Mrs. Cray said, sharply, and a little angry flush rose to her face. "You seemed to admire Mrs. Carruthers immensely."

"She is a charming little woman," he said,

"and has brains as well as looks. They don't often go together."

"No," said Mrs. Cray, with caustic meaning, "they don't. But when a man admires the looks he is very ready to believe in the brains, or any other gifts of intelligence with which he wishes to endow the object of his admiration."

He lifted his long eyelashes and looked at her somewhat curiously.

"Cross—Pauline?" he said.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNCONVENTIONAL LUNCHEON.

I WISH I could describe Mrs. Cray's face as he said those two words; but I could no more do that than I could put down on paper the coaxing, caressing inflection of the voice that spoke them.

The cloud left her brow; the light came back to her eyes.

"You impertinent boy!" she said, and laughed like her old natural self. "Of course I'm cross. See how busy I am, and you come here to interrupt me."

"Oh no!" he said; "to help; I assure you I am most desirous to be of service. But Jane is obdurate; and you—well, you haven't deigned to notice my anxiety to be useful."

"It was so skilfully concealed," said Mrs. Cray, "that I must plead guilty. But if you

really wish to do anything, you might move the chairs and tables into their right places in the drawing-room. I engaged a woman to come in to day and help Jane, but she has not turned up."

"Permit me," he said, gaily, "to supply her place. Half-a-crown and my beer—that's all I ask. Isn't that the regulation fee, Jane?"

"Too much by a sixpence, sir," I said, smiling in spite of myself.

"Dear me!" he said; "how badly we pay women for labour. I had no idea—but then I've never kept house, you see. Well, I'm off to do my duty. You'll say I deserve the extra sixpence. By-bye, Pauline."

He went off smiling and humming a little song to himself; and we heard him moving to and fro in the room overhead, and making a great deal of noise, if that was any guarantee of the amount of work he was accomplishing.

I saw mistress was getting restless and fidgety again.

"You'd better go and see to him, ma'am," I suggested. "He won't remember where to place the things, I'm sure."

She looked at the array on the table.

"It's nearly done, isn't it?" she said. "I think I may leave you to finish, Jane."

"Will Mr. Tresyllion stay to lunch?" I asked. "There's plenty over from supper, you know ma'am; and I shall have this room all straight by one o'clock."

"I'll ask him," she said, the colour rising in her face again.

She left the room, and the noises upstairs ceased abruptly.

There was very little done to the drawing-room when I went to tell them lunch was ready. And presently they came down, and took their places at the little flower-decked table, as I had often seen them do before; only now there was a constraint—a difference—I could not say exactly what; but the frank, free, careless talk lacked something of its customary ease.

She told him about her new book, and gave him a slight sketch of the plot. And I remember, too, she was accusing him of being very idle.

"You have not written a line since 'Delilah,'" she said. "Are you going to rest on your laurels?"

"I have not gained any yet," he said. "They are the tribute of genius. Mine is mere talent."

"It is more than that," she said. "You know genius is comprehension, wide and deep,

and—intuition. You showed us you possessed the latter long ago. Mere talent would never have inspired 'Delilah.'"

"Do not speak of that," he said, suddenly, "Sometimes I feel ashamed that I ever wrote it."

"Since when?" she asked, coldly.

Their eyes met in a sort of challenge. In hers there was anger, fear, dread of the answer she had demanded, and yet a determination to have that answer.

Had Mr. Tresyllion spoken the truth, I am sure he would have said, "Since last night." As it was, his eyes sought his plate. "Perhaps," he said, "it is because I have learnt the truth of what you said the first time we met. There are women—and women."

"You remember that?" she said, in a quick, breathless way.

"Oh, I think I remember everything you said to me," he answered, frankly. "I have a fatal memory, and that evening was one of my landmarks, Pauline."

She did not answer, nor did she look at him; but the hand that lifted her glass trembled so much that a few red drops fell on the white cloth.

"Poets are not truthful as a rule," he went

on reflectively. "It comes very easy to rail at life, and the sin and shams of it all. We paint our morality, and break our hearts, and dream our dreams in verse; but I believe most of us live the lives of ordinary men just the same."

"Do—you?" she said, quickly.

I think she was sorry a moment after that she had asked the question, for he coloured up to the very roots of the fair, crisp curls that lay in careless waves above his forehead.

"I?" he said, presently. "Oh, I am no worse—no better. You see I have never had any home ties or interests. I seem to have been always alone as far as sympathy or affection go. I count myself happy that I possess two friends; a man and a woman. The man is Grant. He is such a splendid fellow. Thorough—as we say."

"And the woman?" she asked, trying to steady her voice and appear indifferent.

"Oh," he said gently. "Surely you need not ask that. The woman is—yourself, Pauline."

She drew a sharp, quick breath.

I thought what a pity it all was. I, looking on, and quite forgotten, could see the game so plainly. The useless pain she was dealing herself, and his unconsciousness of the cause.

It was all so pleasant, so pretty, so harmless

to look at, just for all the world like a comedy set on the stage; but I could not help thinking that when the curtain fell, and the lights were out, and the players were alone, there would be very little comedy for one of them.

I went down then and made coffee and brought it up, and they sat on there drinking the coffee and smoking cigarettes in the free-and-easy fashion that Mrs. Cray called "Bohemian."

For my part I saw no harm in it. He was just as respectful and nice as if a dozen people had been there, and I am sure Mrs. Cray was not in the least a "fast" woman. But, doubtless, the society Mrs. Grundy rules would hold up its hands in righteous horror at such goings on as I have described and say: "Well, a woman who would do *that* would do anything."

But that is just where society errs.

It is the oddest thing how it blames in one person what it condones in another. How distinctly it has marked the line between the horse stealer, and the person who dares only look over the hedge. How it scouts the idea of a woman having "principle," because she is unconventional, and looks upon petty forms and regulations as mere words and wind of a false code of propriety.

A woman may be reckless, but not necessarily wicked; she may be eccentric, yet not improper; she may have weaknesses, but not vices; yet all are classed together in a mass by a hard and fast rule, so that it becomes as great a crime to take a little latitude as to be downright wicked.

It is very senseless and very unreasonable. For I am sure that if a woman can be frank, careless and natural, without fear of being misjudged, she is not only the happier, but the safer for it.

Some women, of course. Their natures vary, just as men's do, or their skin, and eyes, and hair. That is why it is so foolish to say they are all alike and must all be ruled and governed in exactly the same manner. So they are hemmed round with safeguards, at which they laugh, and doctrines which they don't believe, and the result is discontent, and treachery, and sin.

These are some of the ideas I picked up at Mrs. Cray's, for, indeed, her place was what she called it—"a liberal education;" and whether they are right or wrong, I think there is some sense in them, and so I put them down here, though I'm sure some people will think me very audacious for doing it. But I can

only say, as an excuse, that all my histories are true ones; and the portraits of men and women are real portraits as I found them, and lived with them, and studied them from my point of view.

It is not the point of view the world ever takes, or their friends take. It may seem coarse and rough; but there it is. I have no skill to fine it down, and gloss it over. Some of those of whom I write are dead and gone; and others are scattered far and wide in strange lands and distant countries.

Mr. Tresyllion left about four o'clock, and then Mrs. Cray set to work to help me, and we had the house all straight again by six when master came home.

He was in a great state of excitement, and called out for mistress directly he set foot in the hall. She told me afterwards that he had had an offer to go on a sketching-tour, for three months, for the proprietors of one of the big illustrated papers. The pay was good, and he liked the idea, but would not decide until he heard what she thought of the matter.

She was very pale, and there was a strange, dreamy, absent look in her eyes. I knew what she was debating within herself. I knew it before even I read one of her "scraps of ideas,"

which was lying about in the bedroom. It said: "I wonder why the devil always sends a temptation, at the very moment we are least capable of resisting it!"

She was always writing down sentences in this fashion, and I was never allowed to tear up any scrap of paper, for fear it might contain one of these valuable records. Old bills, the backs of envelopes, the margins of a newspaper, the cover of a book; each and all of these were utilised for her "ideas." They seemed to come to her at odd times—when she was brushing her hair, or in the midst of dressing for a party, or dusting the china in the drawing-room, or having one of her erratic meals. But I had got used to her now, and thought nothing of it. I suppose geniuses, or artists, or composers must be different to the ordinary run of people. But I do think they ought to be very careful whom they marry, for they are apt to make a hash of domestic life, and their relative partners require to be very patient and forbearing if they want peace or comfort.

Mr. Cray suggested that his wife should let the house in Bruton Street furnished, and live at their little cottage while he was away; but she didn't seem to like the idea, and so it dropped.

For the next week all was bustle and hurry-

scurry. Shopping, and packing, and preparations. One morning Mrs. Cray sent me out for something or other, and I had to go through the Park and passed along the Row where the ladies and gentlemen were riding.

I thought what a pretty sight it was. The bright sunshine sparkling through the trees, the beautiful horses, the pretty women in their neat, perfectly-cut habits. I stood by the rails to look on, when presently I saw a lady stop her horse just a few yards higher up, and stoop down to speak to a young man leaning negligently against the rails. As he lifted his hat, and looked up at the bright, sparkling little face, I recognised them both—Miss Kate and Mr. Tresyllion.

The pretty chestnut she was riding fidgeted and capered about, but his mistress did not seem inclined to cut short her conversation for any sign of impatience on his part.

As I watched them I could not help thinking how happy they looked. Once or twice she laughed ; the pretty, heart-whole, ringing laugh I knew so well. Then at last she gave him her hand, and settled herself straight in the saddle, and cantered away down the Row, as pretty and as dainty a figure as ever one would wish to see.

I noticed that Mr. Tresyllion watched her till she was out of sight, and presently he turned round and came walking slowly by where I stood, swinging his cane in an absent sort of fashion, his eyes bent on the ground.

The light and laughter had all gone out of his face. It looked grave, thoughtful, almost sad.

I left the Park and went about my errand; but I had my own thoughts about that meeting, and wondered how often they had seen each other to get so friendly and so intimate as they seemed.

Mr. Tresyllion had not been to Bruton Street for a week; but my mistress had said nothing about it. Perhaps she was thinking of weeks to come, when she would be by herself, and free to invite whom she pleased, and would be able to make up for these seven days devoted to duty and her husband.

Mr. Cray left on a Saturday, and on the next Sunday evening she had some of her special "chums," as she called them, in to supper. Two or three women whom she really liked, and who all did "something," Mr. Tresyllion and his friend, Archie Grant, and two other men—artists, whose names are not important.

Again, as I watched Mr. Tresyllion, I saw

that there certainly was some change about him. He was far graver than usual, and so absent-minded, that sometimes he answered all haphazard, and at others did not even seem to know he was being spoken to. The women chaffed him; the men suggested he was thinking out another "Delilah." Mrs. Cray alone was silent on the subject, being in very brilliant spirits herself, and looking perfectly lovely in an artistic gown of dark-blue velvet and lace. Once, shortly before I left the room, I heard him say:

"Why don't you ask Mrs. Carruthers to one of your Sundays, Pauline? I'm sure she'd like to come."

She flashed a quick, searching look at him.

"Ask Mrs. Carruthers!" she echoed, coldly. "What an idea! I'd as soon think of asking the Queen, or Mrs. Gladstone; they would be just as suitable guests."

"What nonsense!" he said. "She's very clever and very brilliant; and she enjoys artistic society a great deal more than she does fashionable."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Cray, sarcastically. "She seems to have confided her tastes to you on a very short acquaintance."

"Oh," he said, indifferently, "I have met

her several times lately—at the Ellertons', and —and other places; and we were talking about people and entertainments, and what a bore they generally are; and I—well, I mentioned your Sundays. That was how the subject came up."

"I am infinitely obliged to you," she said. "But I thought you knew 'my Sundays' are exclusively for the 'working bees' of Society, not the drones, or the butterflies. The passport is work of some sort. I have yet to learn that Mrs. Carruthers benefits the world at large in any other way than do most pretty and frivolous women, whom fortune has provided with ample means and extravagant tastes."

He had tact enough to notice the subject did not please her, and so changed it; but I could see that she was in a very bad temper, and far more sarcastic and cynical than I had ever seen her. The result was that Mr. Tresyllion left much earlier than usual; and that did not improve her state of mind, though I think she was careful not to be betray the reason of her anger to him or anyone else.

On the whole, the first festivity that inaugurated her "grass widowhood" was somewhat of a failure. She had not expected it to be so; but things rarely turn out as we promise them

to ourselves, with that selfish and short-sighted wisdom that seeks its own aims and desires, and expects the force of its own inclination to control other wills and bind other natures.

I felt almost sorry for her that night. I felt sorrier still when I heard her sobbing and crying as if her heart would break, in the deserted dining room long after her guests had gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOREWARNED.

THE next day a letter came for me from Miss Kate, asking me to go and see her and the children, if Mrs. Cray could spare me.

The note said: "Come about five p.m. They always have tea with me in my boudoir, so you will see them to great advantage."

Mrs. Cray gave me leave; and, about half-past four, I started off for the house in Manchester Square which they had taken for the season. Miss Kate had given orders that I should be shown up to her room, and there I found her with the children. One was sitting on her knee looking at a picture-book, the other standing by the window, craning his pretty, fair head to see over the flower-boxes into the street below.

She jumped up and welcomed me warmly. "Here, boys," she called out, "this is my old

nurse who used to take care of me when I was a little girl. Come and shake hands with her."

I thought how pretty she looked standing there with those handsome little fellows. She had on a loose, soft tea-gown of some deep gold stuff, and a great bunch of crimson roses at her waist. The youngest boy was dark, and very like her; the eldest had a grave, fair face, and calm, steady, grey eyes.

They were not the least shy or abashed, but did just as she told them, and soon began to chat away with me in most friendly fashion.

Miss Kate gave me some tea, and made me tell her all that had happened since I left Dayrell Court.

She was very indignant when she heard the way Tom had behaved, and how he had gone off and left me quite destitute.

I suppose I had been there about half-an-hour, when suddenly Master Jack, the eldest boy, began to tap at the window and make signals, and seemed in a great state of excitement.

"Oh, mother!" he cried, "there's Rex down there in the street, and he's looking up. Do let me run down and ask him in?"

"My dear," said Miss Kate, "he was here only two days ago. He can't possibly want to see you again."

"Well, I want to see him," said the boy, and he dashed out of the room and down the stairs for all the world like a whirlwind. His mother rose and rang the bell.

"I had better have some fresh tea," she said, and then she came back to the table and stood looking down at it with a soft, happy smile, as if at some pleasing memory.

I imagined that Master Jack had gone off after some young friend and was bringing him back. I was therefore not a little surprised when, with much laughter and shouting, he dashed into the room with—Rex Tresyllion.

"Captured again!" he said, laughing. "Mrs. Carruthers, I shall have to give your square a wide berth if this young brigand is always on the watch for me. It's next to impossible to pass the house without an onslaught; and, really, sooner than make a scene in this extremely proper neighbourhood, I have to give in to his demands."

Her face certainly said he was welcome, and I suppose the assurance satisfied him, for he rattled on with a whole string of nonsense to the children in a merry, boyish fashion, as dif-

ferent as possible from the "company manners" I had seen at Mrs. Cray's evenings.

"Now, Jack, preserve the sanctity of my pockets!" he said at last. "The fairies have not been at work to-day. Here, Reggie, come and give me a kiss; what are you holding on to your mother's gown, for? That is quite a baby trick." He threw himself into one of the low easy-chairs scattered about, and the little fellow leaped on his knee and kissed him with right good will.

"What you brought me, Rex?" he lisped. "Candies?"

"Oh, the ingenuousness of childhood!" exclaimed Mr. Tresyllion. "How obstinately they refuse to let us credit them with a disinterested preference for our society! Well, Reggie, there may be a packet of wholesale indigestion in the left-hand pocket. Now mind, the left; if you don't remember it to-day, I shall give the box to Jack."

It was pretty to see the elaborate care and attention the little fellow gave to the consideration of the subject before making that final plunge, which proved successful.

"How you spoil them," said Miss Kate, rebukingly. "And you know I don't like them to eat sweets."

"Oh, chocolates won't hurt," he said, glancing up. "Halloa, Jane," he exclaimed in surprise, as he caught sight of me, "you here!"

"How on earth do you know Jane?" asked Miss Kate, wonderingly.

"Have you forgotten how and where we first met?" he said, laughingly. "Jane is quite an old acquaintance of mine. I saw so much of her at the Crays'."

"Oh, of course; I remember now. You are there a great deal."

She said it rather coldly and stiffly, and busied herself with the tea-cups, and poured out some fresh tea which the footman brought in just then.

I rose to take my leave, but she would not hear of my going, so I went over to the window, and Master Reggie followed me with his picture-book, and I sat there with him on my knee showing him the pictures, and receiving an occasional chocolate drop as a reward.

I was wondering how Mr. Tresyllion had come to be so very intimate in the household. The two boys always addressed him as "Rex," and, indeed, Miss Kate once or twice did the same. Master Jack seemed just to adore him, and I must say that I never met anyone with

so pleasant and taking a way with children as he had.

"Do you know, Mrs. Carruthers," he said once, "that I always hold you up as a model of the domestic virtues to all my married lady friends. I know no one else who allows her children in her boudoir to the sacred feminine institution of five o'clock tea. It is a very charming idea. I wish they would; but, perhaps," he added reflectively, "the habit might have its drawbacks. They are apt to have quick ears and sharp memories, and the society that drops in for 'five o'clocks' is not always as innocent and harmless as——"

"Yours?" she suggested, as he paused.

"Thank you," he said. "My youth and that supreme modesty, which you may have observed——"

"Frequently," she said, with the greatest gravity of face and voice.

"I feared you might have overlooked it. I can't say how your assurance relieves me. But I was about to remark that if you attend many of these feminine conclaves, you have no doubt noticed the special friend or two—of the male persuasion—who drop in with the undeviating regularity of a machine."

She coloured softly and looked embarrassed. He suddenly put down his cup.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, earnestly. "I sometimes forget, when speaking to you, how different you are from — from other women."

"Oh, no," she said in a constrained, hurried way. "Don't think that, pray. I—I am very much guided by my own wishes in such matters. If I did not like to have the children with me I shouldn't let them in. As it is——"

"As it is, you have some womanly instincts and feelings," he said, softly. "And yet you're not one of the silly, gushing type of mothers."

"I observe," she said, "that you are getting reflective. Let me warn you in time. It is a bad habit, and, once acquired, not easily shaken off."

"I know," he said, "that you treat everything lightly; but you, yourself, cannot be lightly treated or—thought of," he added, in a lower tone. "There may be now and then a person—even not reflective—who has found that out."

"I am sorry for that imaginary person," she said.

She leant back in her chair and took up her fan—a large palm-leaf one, which she moved

lightly to and fro—glancing at him the while in a provocative, mischievous way, for which I should like to have shaken her.

"You are quite sure," he said, lowering his voice, "that it is—imaginary?"

"As sure as that I take everything lightly, and have never given any subject five minutes' serious consideration in my life," she answered.

"You don't expect me to believe that," he said. "I wonder why you always try to make me believe you are frivolous."

"Oh," she said, with unembarrassed readiness, "pray don't speak as if I had made an effort to impress you with my being—anything. Didn't we agree the other night that everything in the world is illusive, and imaginary, and that the theory of the primordial atomic globule was the only theory any sensible person ought to take of the mystery of existence!"

"The other night," he said, "we talked a great deal of nonsense, and called it philosophy."

"Let us make a change, then," she said, laughing up at him as he leant slightly forward. "To-day we will talk philosophy and call it —nonsense."

"No," he answered; "I am not in the mood for either subject."

"Are you going to be serious?" she asked,

waving the fan slowly to and fro, so that it sometimes revealed, sometimes hid her face. "Be warned in time. I am not, and I don't intend that you should be."

"And why?" he said, impetuously. "Is my mood to wait on yours? I am not at all fond of being dictated to, nor at all meek under coercion."

"No more am I. What a wonderful similarity of disposition, is it not? Now, who is going to yield?"

"*Place aux dames*," he said, laughing. "I give in as usual."

"You need not have done so," she said, "for I am just going to dismiss you. I am due at one of those feminine conclaves to which you alluded so slightingly a few moments ago. Will you stay and amuse Jack and Reggie while I change my gown, or shall I say good-bye now?"

"Where are you going?" he asked, rather eagerly. "Perhaps I am bound for the same place."

"I think not," she said. "For I asked my hostess if she knew you, and she said she had not that honour."

"You did not offer to supply the necessary introduction, I suppose?"

"Why should I?" she asked, rising from the chair, and standing there in her pretty, indolent grace before him. "Don't you think we have enough mutual acquaintances already?"

"If I said—no?"

There was something in his eyes and voice that seemed to startle her. She turned quickly away.

"Come, boys," she said, "say good-bye to Rex; he is going."

The young fellow's face turned very pale; his eyes flashed stormily; but he said nothing as the children rose up, only tossed Reggie up in his strong arms, and then set him down with a kiss.

Meanwhile, Miss Kate made a sign to me.

"Come to my bedroom, Jane," she said; "we can finish our chat while I am changing my dress.

She turned, and held out her hand.

"Try and bear up," she said, mockingly. "The parting is not for very long;" and she laughed, and moved away to the door, while he stood silently watching her with something in his eyes which was not anger or pain, but surely a blending of both.

I followed her, leaving the children clinging to Mr. Tresyllion's arm.

Once in her bedroom, she seemed to change quite suddenly. Perhaps she had forgotten I was there: I don't know. The colour faded from her face; her eyes grew sad and wistful. She went over to the mantelpiece, and leant one hand on it as if to support herself.

"What is it, Miss Kate; you are ill?" I cried, anxiously.

She started, and made a visible effort to command herself.

"The season is trying me, I think," she said, "or I am not as strong as I used to be. Really, Jane, sometimes I am obliged to confess I feel —tired."

She laughed a little, mirthless laugh—more pathetic to me than tears.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," I cried, as I came over to her and put my arm round the trembling figure, for all the world as I use to do when she was a little child. "Go away from here—go to your own safe, quiet home. This is not the place, not the life for you. Why should you wear out your health and youth and strength for the sake of society? What can it give you in exchange?"

"I should have said nothing, a month ago," she said, wearily. "I daresay you are right, Jane; my life is not healthy or natural, only I

seem now as if I can't do without excitement. The days are so long, the hours so wearisome."

"They should not be that, surely," I said. "What do you lack? You have a beautiful home, a good husband, children, friends, position, money. You ought to be as happy as the day is long."

She turned on me with something of the old fire and passion.

"Happy!" she cried, "I happy! What are those things to one cursed with my restless, miserable, discontented nature? Don't talk to me of happiness; you take the world's view of it; you don't even understand the meaning of the word!"

She tore off her beautiful gown and tossed it aside with superb disdain, and, somehow, how or why I don't know, but as I saw her moving to and fro in that restless, impetuous fashion, I thought of the pretty child-figure with the bare arms and neck, and short, white, fluttering skirts, that I had watched dancing like a leaf in the wind, in that hotel bedroom in Paris so many years ago. And as I thought of it the tears rushed to my eyes, and it seemed to me as if I must speak one word of warning if only for the sake of that memory.

"Miss Kate," I said, and then a sob rose in my

throat, and she turned and looked at me in wonder. "Oh, Miss Kate," I went on in a broken, foolish fashion, "don't be angry with me, don't be offended. Remember I am only your old nurse, who loves you better than anyone else in the world. Oh, my dear, I know what troubles you—and—and it will only get worse. Anyone must be blind not to see that. Don't rush into wilful misery; don't add another to the many sad histories of society women. Your fate is marked out, you can't alter it now. You are not happy; but better a little unhappiness at the first than the misery that will surely follow—if—if you yield."

She sank down on the chair by the dressing-table. Her face was very white. Her great dark eyes looked at me like the eyes of some wounded and suffering creature.

"You have noticed—even you," she said, in a stifled, husky voice. "Good Heaven! have I fallen so low already?"

"I have been mad, I think," she went on, brokenly. "I thought I was so safe; that I should never care; that I could defy Fate. Oh, Jane, you are right. My good angel must have sent you to me. I will leave town at once —to-morrow, if possible. I—oh, it isn't possible that I should care so much, that it will

hurt me to do it. I was always such a coward, you know, Jane. I—I never could bear pain well. But if it has to be done, it must be done quickly—at once. Oh, you are right, quite right, I know; and I—what a blind, silly fool I have been! But I shall stop in time. You have shown me the precipice, while I was looking only at the flowery path that led to it. But, oh! Jane, Jane!——"

She threw herself into my arms, my poor, pretty dear, just as if she was the little, wilful, passionate child I used to scold and pet in the old days. It wrung my heart to hear her sobs. It made me bitterly indignant to think of the selfishness, and cruelty, and vanity that had led her on to suffer like this.

"As if one woman at a time wasn't enough," I said to myself in bitter indignation. "What brutes men are!"

And then Miss Kate drew herself away from my arms, and suddenly seemed to grow quite cold and calm.

"Go home now, Jane," she said, "and don't worry about me any more. When I once make up my mind to do a thing, I can trust myself to go through with it. I have been playing with fire, but the scorch and the pain have only hurt me—no one else."

She kissed me, and then put me aside somewhat hurriedly

"Good-bye, Jane," she said. "Heaven bless you for your faithful love. When to-morrow comes, think of me, and—and pray for me now and then. Perhaps I may need your prayers, Jane, more than you think—need them, though I have taken your advice and gone away from this hateful town to—to, what was it you called it, Jane?—my own safe, quiet home—my own safe—quiet—home"

CHAPTER XIV.

INFATUATION.

I WENT back to Mrs. Cray's with a very heavy heart.

Of course I saw how it all had come about, only too plainly. The mutual attraction of that first meeting; the sympathy and suitability of the two young, impulsive, romantic natures. There had been no thought of danger to either —at first. There never is, or there would be no unhappy love stories in the world for poets to write of, and sentimental folk to weep over.

That slow, subtle drifting, with closed eyes and unconscious hearts, up to the danger point, where temptation, and pain, and misery set in. How often, how often I have seen it! In more cases, perhaps, than friends or foes ever dreamt; in more cases than husbands or wives themselves suspected. For human nature is terribly human, despite restraints, artifices, and conventionalities.

It is not always the mournful face that hides

the heaviest heart. Sometimes, when lips were laughing, I have watched the eyes, and I think tears would have seemed less sad than the look I have seen. I have wondered what the history was that was hidden from the world; what brought the sudden tremor to lip and hand; the sudden pallor to bronzed cheek of man, or fair, flushed face of woman.

With gay words, and fashionable jargon, and indifferent laughter, and careless, cynical philosophy, the men and women of the world play their part; yet here and there one notes the weariness, the languor, the disgust underlying the jest and the philosophy; and, in so noting them, one can but wonder why they should deem it worth while to act and pretend, and be untrue to themselves for the sake of a society their better natures must despise. It is a mystery indeed.

Mrs. Cray was at home when I went in, and apparently not in the best of tempers. She put a few questions to me, which I answered very shortly. I had no idea of telling her about Mr. Tresyllion, or what I had seen and suspected.

That night she told me she was going to write, and sent me off to bed as usual. I was so worried about Miss Kate that I could not sleep. I tossed to and fro, and my head began to ache

as if it would burst, and at last in despair, I got up and resolved to go down to the kitchen and make myself some tea. I heard the hall clock strike twelve as I went softly down the stairs, and past the dining-room door.

I thought I would knock and tell Mrs. Cray that I was about the house, in case she should be alarmed at the noise; but as I paused there on the mat, a sound startled me, and my hand dropped.

It was the sonnd of a champagne cork flying off. Then a voice—Rex Tresyllion's voice—fell on my ear.

"Give me a tumblerful, Pauline. I'm nearly dead with worries and vexations. I need something to pull me together."

I was too amazed to move—Rex Tresyllion here, at this hour, alone with Mrs. Cray!

"Well!" I thought, "this is Bohemianism with a vengeance!"

I suppose I am neither better nor worse than most of my sex, if I confess to the humiliating fault of curiosity. For the first time in my life I was guilty of the meanness of listening.

Mrs. Cray's voice answered him. "My poor boy—and what has worried you? Won't you tell me?"

"Oh," he said, "it wouldn't interest you.

Never mind, Pauline. I came to you because you always rest and comfort me. You are the only woman I know, who does that."

There was a moment's pause. Then she said in a hoarse, choked voice: "I wish to Heaven, Rex, that I could take every care and trouble in the world off your shoulders and bear them for you! I would do it gladly—for your sake."

A sob seemed to break her voice. I think she must have left her seat and thrown herself down by his chair.

"Oh, Rex, Rex!" she cried passionately. "I can't help it—I can't bear it any longer. I must speak or I shall die. Didn't you see what your words—your looks were doing? Scorching my heart with a very madness of passionate love, destroying all the peace and content of my life! I tried to live it down; to stamp it out. I might as well try to forget I live, and—suffer."

"Good Heavens, Pauline!" he cried. "Are you mad?"

"Perhaps"—she said. "But you shall hear me, you must. Why have you come here as you did?—sought me, flattered me, tortured me? Did you think you were the sort of man that a woman could only care for in the cold sense that friendship means? You have taught me one lesson, that life, and experience, and my world

had failed to teach, and if you hate me, or despise me after to-night, I cannot help it. Your presence is like life to me. Your very step in the street, your voice on the stairs will make my sick heart throb, live, rejoice! Oh, Rex, you knew, you saw—you are not so blind that it needed words like—these."

"No," he said, huskily. "I saw—I know. For Heaven's sake, Pauline, get up. Why should you kneel to me. I am not worth any woman's love, and yet you care—you care so much."

"More than my life," she said.

In the stillness came one deep sob—a stifled murmur.

"Say you don't despise me," she went on, passionately. "Say it, Rex, or, as I live, I will not wait to see another sun rise on the shame and sorrow of my wretched life."

He may have argued with her, or accepted that homage to his vanity at cost of mutual self-respect. I don't know; and I cannot say. I only remember that I crept away, sick at heart with shame, and shut myself in my own little attic, and thought, "Is the world all mad; are women all fools; has life no better thing in it than this love, for which they are wrecking themselves, and all good gifts which they may possess?" "Oh, Miss Kate!" I said to myself

again and again, "oh, my dear! what an escape for you; what a blessing for you that in time you had the strength to see your danger. He is utterly, utterly worthless."

For, indeed, so it seemed to me, knowing nothing, as I did then, of that strange sense of honour which sometimes makes a man refrain from humiliating a woman too deeply; which, for the sake of the love he has won unsought, will make him as chivalrous as if that love were a guerdon, not a shame; which rends his heart with pity as the whirlwind of the weaker creature's passion rocks him in its frenzied blast, and so leads him on to pretend the love she has never awakened, and to suffer the ignominy and despair she never suspects. But other lessons and other experiences had to teach me that. On this night I blamed him as much as I hated him; and I only longed to know Miss Kate was safe out of his reach or knowledge, and resolved to tell her what he really was, if only to cure her of her folly in time.

Mrs. Cray had the grace to keep her room all next day. I saw and heard nothing of her till the evening, and then, after preparing her usual meal, I told her that the place did not suit me, and that I must leave her service.

She looked very much astonished and put out, and argued with me for ever so long. But I was quite firm; my mind was made up, and I kept to my resolution.

That night's post brought me a letter from Miss Kate, saying that she was leaving for Devonshire next day.

Oh, how glad I was to hear it! How proudly I told myself that she, at least, was safe, and that time would heal the smart, and that she would be her bright, merry little self again!

Ah me! as if fate ever did what we expect and desire; as if it does not blind us first to danger, and then let loose all possible risks and temptations across the path on which our feet are set.

The whole of that month, my last month with Mrs. Cray, I did not once set eyes on Mr. Tresyllion. But I knew he came there, for all that; and I knew, too, that the new book got on very, very slowly for all the hours that were supposed to be given up to it. Now and then she would dash off fragments of ideas and thoughts as mad as herself, I think. I used to pick up scraps of paper in her bedroom, or the dining-room, with the oddest things written on them. I give a few here:

"How little women understand men when they try to rule them. . . As if the strongest bond is not the one that is never seen."

"To bore a man, is to give the death-blow to his love. Never let him feel you exact anything—only that he is yielding, not that you are compelling."

"The art of knowing when 'to let men alone' is the one art that seems impossible to women who love them. There is just a point to which passion may be led without straining. . . . Never reproach your lover when he is irritable, or weary. Never implore him when his impulse does not answer the prayer of your eyes. To know when to caress is as necessary to love, as to know when to be silent is necessary to true comradeship."

"The passion of jealousy is a descent into depths of humiliation. Be jealous, but never betray it to the rival who excites it, or to the man whose love you crave, or possess, or would keep."

"When a man fears to tell you of any trouble, any folly, any mistake, his love is on the wane. Withheld confidence is a spur that

goads conscience, and irritates him into further wrong-doing for mere desire of forgetfulness. Love is too sharp-set not to be easily blunted; the edge may be set again, but it is never quite the same—clear, polished, unmarked by the grindstone of circumstance."

"Misery is the spur that goads passion; comfort the leading rein that guides love. Do not blame; do not reproach; do not seek to detach your lover from habits, tasks, and inclinations, which are to him as second nature. It may be easy to win, it is hard to hold. When you have learned *that* secret, love has nothing more to teach."

"Let a man once feel that he can come to a woman for sympathy as well as love, for comprehension as well as sympathy, for companionship in his good or bad moods, for laughter as for tears, for sorrow as for joy, for stimulus as for soothing, for passion as for content, and he will ask no more save to rest on her heart, and love, and be loved."

I used to wonder she did not publish all her ideas in a little volume, and call it "Pauline Cary's Philosophy of Love." I am sure it would

have had a wide circulation, and done an immense amount of good, besides initiating the inexperienced.

I suppose she was happy at this time. I don't know. She never said a word to me, and I suppose never dreamt that I suspected what was going on.

I think she was as absolutely, madly, blindly infatuated as ever woman was. Yet she was clever enough to keep her charm for him, even after that humiliating self-betrayal. She grew positively beautiful at times, as if the fire in her heart had lent her youth, charm, brilliance.

I looked at her with a sort of wonder on those evenings when I knew she expected him, wondering if, indeed, she could be the same woman—careless, slovenly, erratic—into whose service I had entered a brief twelve months before.

I suppose there is a sorcery about love that is quite beyond explaining. It certainly seems to me that it is the one strong ungovernable passion, for which human lives are wrecked; so wantonly, so carelessly, so irrationally, that one can but hold one's breath and gaze in stupefied wonder and ask—"Why?"

But I did not call Mrs. Cray's infatuation "love." It seemed to me a hot, cruel caprice

that had fastened on this man from the first hour his handsome, laughing, boyish face had looked back to hers, on that fatal Sunday night.

Mrs. Cray had often said that she was fond of discerning and analysing character, though whether she had formed a correct judgment it is not for me to say. She was quite clever enough to know something about the world she lived in, and the life she described.

When one knows the world, one ceases to expect miracles from the men and women who make it what it is.

Self-sacrifice is only possible to a great nature. Mrs. Cray's was not that by any manner of means; but I have no right to sit in judgment upon her, no right to hint even at her folly, or the lengths to which it led her. I left her at the end of the month to go to a place I had heard of, in the country, as housekeeper to a doctor.

We parted very good friends. Perhaps she was relieved to think I was going away. I don't know, but I could not help thinking it as I saw her eyes fall before mine when I mentioned her husband's name. And, really, I felt as if I were leaving a mine with the train laid for explosion, and only the match wanted, as I drove off from the little house in Bruton Street.

setting for its dainty, little mistress; but as the door opened, and I went in, and she rose to greet me, I felt a sort of shock and terror at the change I saw in her.

She was dressed in white: something loose, and soft, and fleecy, and with no particle of colour about her, and her face seemed to have grown terribly thin and pale, and there were dark lines under the soft, brown eyes that made them look strangely sad and wistful.

"Well, Jane!" she said, quite cheerfully, and smiled up at me.

Now, whether it was the smile, or the look, or the effort that made both so infinitely pathetic, I don't know; but I felt the tears rush into my eyes and nearly blind me as I took both the little outstretched hands in mine.

"Have you been ill, Miss Kate?" I cried involuntarily.

"Do I look ill?" she said, and glanced at the mirror opposite. "Oh, no. I am quite well, really. The—the season has fagged me a little, that is all, and I haven't had time to recoup myself after such unusual dissipation. Come and sit down and talk to me. You are going to another situation, you said. What a restless old Jane it is."

She pushed forward a chair, and sank into

another by the bay-window, which was wide open, and showed the beautiful grounds and the sloping terraces, and the moonlight gleaming softly over the quiet trees.

I sat down opposite to her as she bade me. The room was dimly lit by one lamp on a table at the other end. Her delicate face and head were thrown into faint relief, and seemed to me to have something almost unreal about them.

For a moment or two I could not speak, only sat quietly watching her, and at last she turned to me with a poor little effort at a smile, which soon died away.

"Why have you left Mrs. Cray?" she said.

For the life of me I could not help starting. I had forgotten that she would be almost sure to ask that question, and I could not tell her the truth. I felt my face grow warm, but the friendly darkness doubtless concealed it.

"I—I was not comfortable," I said. "She is such a strange woman, turning night into day as she does."

"Is she—is she a good woman, do you think?" Miss Kate asked suddenly.

Her voice was not steady, and the little hands that lay loosely clasped on her lap, trembled visibly.

"What do you mean by a—good woman?" I said.

"Is she true and honourable? Would she be a safe friend for—for a man?"

"That," I said, somewhat dryly, "depends very much on the man. If he were young, handsome, clever, erratic——"

She raised one trembling hand to her face, and half turned from me towards the open window.

"Don't let us talk about it," she said, almost fiercely. "What good can it do? And yet—— Oh, Jane, Jane!" she burst out, passionately, and threw herself on her knees by my side, and hid her face on my lap. "I sent for you," she said, "because it seemed as if I would die if I didn't hear something—something. Tell me—you have seen him since—since that day? Is he well—happy? Do you think he ever remembers——"

"Oh, Miss Kate!" I said. "You must not—indeed you must not think of him like this. Believe me, he is not worth it. He was only amusing himself with you; he is a selfish, unprincipled man. Even if he were not, what good would it be now?"

She sprang to her feet as suddenly as she had thrown herself down, her small hands

clasped tight, her eyes flashing and glowing in the dusky gloom.

"Say that again," she said hoarsely; "say that again. 'Amusing himself with me!'—Is it true, Jane? By Heaven above, if I thought so——"

"Oh, hush, hush!" I cried, horrified at the passion I had evoked. "Be calm, Miss Kate, for Heaven's sake! Sit down there as you were doing, and I will tell you the whole story. I never meant to do so; but it is better. It will cure you of wasting thoughts and feeling on a worthless man."

There was agony in the dark eyes that rested on my face—the agony of a creature that awaits its death blow. But I only thought then of the sharp pain that would prove its own best cure, and I looked away from her to the dark, still night and the heavy shadows, where the moonlight gleamed from time to time.

"I said it, my dear, because I know it to be true," I answered her at last. "He is evidently a man who spends his time in making love to married women. The evening of that afternoon, you remember——?"

"Yes," she said, in a strange, hushed voice.

"He came to—to Mrs. Cray's," I said. "It was late. I had gone to bed; but I had to get

up about midnight, and go downstairs for something. As I passed the dining-room door, I heard them talking."

"You—you are sure," she cried, sharply, "it was he—Rex?"

"Quite, quite sure. She called him by his name, and I knew his voice so well. He was there so often."

"Yes," she said in the same stifled way, "I know; he told me so himself."

"Well," I went on ruthlessly, "I heard enough to convince me that Mrs. Cray allowed him to make love to her. That he, on his side, knew she was in love with him."

There was a moment's dead silence. I was terrified as I looked at her face. The agony, the shame, the horror, the disgust that swept over it. She rose and stood leaning against the window, her hand clasping the silken curtains as if to support herself.

"To think," she said in a husky, stifled voice, "that I—I—should live to suffer for a man's amusement."

I rose, too, but I did not dare to touch her. I was afraid. I stood there silent, waiting for the storm to pass; hoping and praying it might pass in a tempest of tears and sobs, as so often I had known her varying moods to do.

But no. She turned to me at last—white—cold—still.

"Thank you, Jane," she said. "I suppose it is the truth you have told me—not something cruel and disagreeable, 'for my good,' as you used to say of the powders you were so fond of giving me."

"Miss Kate," I said, "it is gospel truth as sure as I live."

She held up her hand to stay further words; then it dropped, and was pressed convulsively to her heart.

"I am rightly served," she said. "I deserve no one's pity — even my own. I—I had no excuse, save that I never dreamt of danger until it was too late. But, oh! how I hate him—*hate* him! I feel as if I could not breathe, live, exist, in the same world where he is now. I feel——" She broke off abruptly; a strange, fierce little laugh rang out on the stillness. "Jane," she cried, and her hand closed on my own like a vice, "if my turn ever comes, if a day ever dawns that tells me I can deal back the suffering and humiliation dealt to me, what a revenge I will take for to-night!"

"Oh, Miss Kate," I cried, "Miss Kate, don't talk so wickedly!"

"Am I—wicked?" she said, and then—

suddenly her strength seemed to go, and she sank back in her chair, and looked at me in a stricken, helpless way. "I suppose I am," she said. "I ought to have no such feelings—no such thoughts. I ought to have remembered who I am—that romance and sentiment died for me at the altar, when John Carruthers made me his wife. I ought—but I could not help myself. Before I cared, I never knew my danger; afterwards—it was very little use."

She hid her face in her hands; her whole frame shook with a shiver as of mortal cold.

"We will not speak of this again," she said presently. "Never again, after to-night. I will go back to duty. Surely, it can't be very hard to be content when one has so much in life to make one so. I was quite happy two months ago, Jane. Quite happy, before this wretched, feverish, restless excitement took possession of me."

"And you will be quite happy again, my dear," I said, gently. "Believe me, you will. Far, far happier than if you knew the—the feeling was mutual. Far happier than Mrs. Cray. I am sure she cannot be happy."

"Not happy!"—It was a new mood now that swayed the passionate, impulsive little heart.—"Not happy, and his eyes are looking back to

hers, and his voice telling her he loves her—and his lips——"

A great flame of colour swept up to her brow. "Why," she went on tempestuously, "I would have *died*—willingly, only once to hear him say he loved me; only once to have felt the touch of his lips on mine."

"Oh, Miss Kate," I cried in horror, "you must not talk like this. You must not. For Heaven's sake, remember——"

"I can remember nothing," she said, fiercely, "until I have worked the mad fit out of me; so let me be, Jane, and if I shock you too much, go down to the servants' hall again."

"Well," I sighed, despairingly, "whatever there is in Mr. Tresyllion for two sensible women to go mad about, beats my powers of comprehension."

"Oh," she said, growing suddenly calm, "my madness will be brief, believe me. It is when I grow sane that I am to be feared."

"Miss Kate," I cried, imploringly, "have you no thought how foolish this is, how wrong?"

"Wrong!"—it was the tempest breaking loose again—"wrong, do you say? As if I hadn't told myself that a million times, and as if those eyes of his hadn't swept away the memory of the telling at the very next glance.

As if I didn't know the full extent of my folly—that I am a wife, a mother—a woman who should have done with dreams, and desires, and all that means the poetry of life, and youth, and makes earth heaven! Oh, Jane, what is the use—what is the use—what is the use? I can't help myself. It must be driven out somehow, I know; but you must give me time, Jane; you must give—me—time——"

And then suddenly she swayed forward, and, with closed eyes, fell like a stone on the floor at my feet.

CHAPTER XVI.

"MY LADY OF MOODS."

I THOUGHT she would have been very ill after that long fainting-fit; but the next day she seemed almost herself again—pale, languid, and strangely quiet—but more like Mrs. Carruthers of Templecombe than the passionate little fury of the previous night.

Mr. Carruthers was still in London, and I was glad of it; for I hoped that she would be stronger and better by the time he came home from his Parliamentary duties.

She sent for me to her boudoir in the afternoon, and I found her lying down on the wide, deep, Chesterfield couch. Her dark hair was drawn, in its lovely, rippling waves, from off her brow, and hung down in a long, loose plait. The pale, delicate pink of her pretty gown set off her clear, dark skin. She looked so young, so

sweet, that, for the life of me, I could only look at her in silent admiration.

"Come and sit down, and we will have some tea, Jane," she said. "I can't stand the boys' noise this afternoon, so I sent them off to the nursery. What a perfect day it has been," she added, as she gazed dreamily at the view through the open window.

The sun was setting over the brow of the wood-covered hills. The blue of the sky, the warmth of the air, the notes of a bird's broken song, all seemed to convey the same impression of peace, and rest, and beauty.

She raised herself on one arm, looking at the view as if she had never seen it before.

"I wish," she said suddenly, "that beautiful things didn't make me so intensely sad; and, somehow—I don't like being sad. When I was a child, Jane, I was such a merry little thing, wasn't I?"

"Yes, Miss Kate," I answered. "And a wicked little thing, too. Lord! the mischief you contrived to get into; the things you'd invent!"

She smiled, a faint little smile, that had no mirth in it, and in which her eyes had no part.

"Jane," she said, "I am going, for the last,

last time, just to give myself up to memory. I—I want you to hear how it all happened. Perhaps you will not blame me so much then. I was mad last night, but I am rational and sensible enough to-day. My heart is quiet; my pulse does not throb. Let us have one more talk together, Jane, and then bury it—and forget."

She lay back again on the cushions. The soft colour came and went in her face.

I poured out some tea, and brought her a cup, and she drank it in a mechanical, absent-minded fashion.

"I had better get it over," she said, suddenly. "I have never spoken to anyone else. I could not; but you, Jane—well, somehow, you are so different; it is like going back to the old childish days again. I saw how astonished you were that time you came to see me in London, when Reggie brought Mr. Tresyllion in to afternoon tea. Only a month before that we had been strangers. Sometimes I wonder, myself, how we drifted into that cosy, natural intimacy. I can hardly tell. We seemed to meet everywhere. I suppose he wished it, for he always managed it. And John liked him, and he used often to drop in on Sundays, and the boys were so fond of him, and he had such a

way with them—well, you know that, I needn't tell you. And all the time I never dreamt of danger. I thought we were such good friends. My life had been calm and quiet, and it seemed so good to laugh, and be happy, and—young, once again; and I always felt that with him. And there was not a word to startle or warn me. I knew he liked to be with me—there was a look in his eyes sometimes——"

Her voice broke. I saw her tremble from head to foot.

"And to think," she cried, stormily, "to think that it was a lie—a lie—a lie!"

Presently she grew calm, and went on. I thought it best that she should tell her story without interruption.

"I suppose," she said wearily, "it is never quite safe to be happy. I was happy, unthinkingly, blissfully happy; and I never dreamt of asking myself why. I often wonder what woke me up."

"Did you wake," I asked her gently, "before —that afternoon?"

"The night before, I think. We were at a party; he had taken me down to supper. Somehow, it often happened that he did take me down to supper—at parties."

She stopped abruptly and looked at me, as if

the pain of some new thought had struck sharply on her notice.

"To think," she said, in a breathless, frightened way, "to think, Jane, that he will never take me down to supper again; and yet, that all my life, even when I am an old woman—if I live to be one—I shall have to remember those evenings!"

"And this special one?" I asked.

"It was different," she said, "in some way. There was a subtle, underlying meaning in the words he said, and I did not find it so easy to jest and laugh. What was it he used to call me? 'My Lady of Moods'? I—I think he wrote a poem on that. He used to quote little bits of it to me just to tease me. I wrote it down once from memory; but I don't think it is quite right. It was something like this:

What shall I say of her?
All that I may of her,
All that is sad of her—sweet in her—glad in her,
Comes to my heart as her name to the lips of me,
Wakens and pulses and thrills every thought of me.
Choose what I could of her,
Think what I would of her,
All that is worst of her—all that is good of her,
Sways me and draws me to love every mood of her,
Changefully changeful—My Lady of Moods!"

"It is very pretty," I said. "No doubt he has written a dozen like it to—Mrs. Cray."

It was cruel; but it pulled her sharp up from her dreaming fancies to reality and common sense.

"Thank you, Jane," she said. "No doubt you are right. Well, I have nearly done. That night he was quieter, graver than I had known him ever to be. There was something—or I thought there was something — deeper, more regretful, in his eyes and voice."

She leant her head back against the cushion and closed her own eyes. Her lips quivered, then set themselves sternly once more.

"I suppose," she went on presently, "I had flirted. It did not seem easy that night; but I laughed, and teased, and jested as—as I had always done, and, when we left the supper-table he began quoting that poem again to tease me; and we went up the stairs and on to the landing, where some seats were. I think there was dancing going on. I remember a waltz strain sounding as he drew me down on to one of the seats with a little imperative gesture. 'Kate,' he said; and I was startled and looked at him, and something in his eyes terrified me.

"'Oh,' he said in a stifled whisper, 'if I dared—if I dared——'

"'Dared what?' I asked, in some spirit of dare-devilry and recklessness which for the moment had taken possession of me, I think.

"'Dared—misquote—one line of that poem,' he said. 'But I'm a little bit afraid of "My Lady of Moods," do you know?'

"'What,' I asked, 'would be the line you would—misquote?'

I should not have asked. I should not have said it. I—I brought my humiliation on myself. His hand closed on mine. I could hear his heart beat.

"'It would be this,' he said, and his voice stole to my ear with the dying strain of the waltz music. 'Come to my heart—as your name to the lips of me.'

"Our eyes met—one quick glance; it said enough—too much. The music ceased, the dancers flocked from the room. I rose, startled, indignant, afraid. That—that was all, Jane."

"And the next night," I said, "the very next night he was making love to Mrs. Cray."

She sprang up, her eyes and cheeks aflame. "It is good-bye to him now," she cried. "Good-bye to folly, sentiment, blindness, imprudence. I did not mean to be a bad woman, Jane. Heaven knows I did not. I would not deceive

my husband knowingly. The drifting was so easy, so pleasant, so safe. But now I am awake; my eyes will never close again on dreams like those."

"I pray to Heaven, not," I cried, and the tears rushed to my own eyes as I looked at her; such a pretty, fragile little thing, and with her young life tortured and spoilt by a man's selfishness. "Oh, Miss Kate," I said. "Why did you marry—why? I told you love would come. No human fate can defy it. And I knew your nature, your temperament. I knew how passionately and recklessly you could love, if once you let yourself go."

And, oh! the strange, little smile that came to her lips as she raised her eyes and looked at me.

"But I have not—'let myself go,' Jane," she said.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LAST CONFIDENCE.

We were silent for a long time then. The sun had set; the air was full of sweet scents from the rose-garden below. I could hear the children's voices laughing out in the stillness.

Perhaps that roused her. I don't know; but she sprang suddenly up, and then stood leaning with one hand against the table. Her face was ghastly.

"Miss Kate!" I cried in terror. "You are ill—you——"

"Hush!" she said. "Don't speak for a moment."

I saw her brows contract. Her hand went to her heart. I could hear its dull laboured beats, in the silence of the quiet room.

At last she looked up and smiled.

"I was almost foolish enough to give way again," she said. "Jane, if you are ever dreadfully unhappy, and you hear a little child's

laugh break across your miserable thoughts, you will know what a heartache is. I thought mine would have broken—just for a moment."

I have many pictures in the gallery of my memory; but among them all there is not one so pathetic, so fair, so infinitely sad, as the picture of that slight young figure, in its trailing draperies of pink, standing outlined against the faint rose light of the sky, with the anguish of an aching heart so bravely repressed, yet speaking out its mute suffering in the quiver of the pale lips, and the agony of the dark, wild eyes.

"It can't be true," she went on, "that I suffer—I—and for a cause so worthless! Haven't I always treated life as a jest, laughed with it, dreamed with it, sung to it, smiled to it, as—as children do? It is very hard, Jane. I did not think such a little thing could hurt so deeply."

"Perhaps," I said, "It will be sooner over."

She drew herself up to her full height. There was something stately, womanly, about the little wild gipsy thing at that moment.

"Yes," she said, "it must be soon over. I never could bear pain; you know that, Jane. Tell me again that I have been deceived, fooled, humiliated. That helps me; that will cure me.

I have not lost my power over myself yet. But if we ever meet——"

"Now, Miss Kate," I said, warningly, as I saw the flash of her eyes, the sudden set of the pretty, soft lips into a hardness and fierceness, that robbed them of all beauty.

"I forgot," she said. "I must not be tragic; it is bad form nowadays. None who respect themselves have anything so uncomfortable as —feelings."

She began to pace to and fro the pretty, dainty room, her head bent, her hands loosely clasped behind her.

"I must have it out with myself to-day," she said. "Afterwards, it does not matter. I can take up the old life where it dropped. Surely this won't make such a difference. I have enjoyed living for its own sake up to that first evening. Why shouldn't I enjoy it again? My feelings were never deep—just as variable as my nature. Even he said that, and I was a good actress, I think, Jane, for he never suspected that I—cared."

"No," I said. "If you were always as you were that afternoon in Manchester Square, no one would have suspected you had any sentiment in the matter."

"If I did not betray myself then," she said,

eagerly, "I am safe. Oh, Jane, if I thought he knew what I feel—what he has made me feel—I should kill myself! I—I could not meet his eyes again."

"Then make yourself happy on that point," I said, "for I watched you keenly and closely enough, and, if anything, you seemed rather too cold and indifferent!"

"Oh, I am glad of that," she said, breathlessly, "I am glad of that!"

Then she stopped in her restless walk, and came and knelt beside me, just as a child would have done, and laid her pretty, dark head against my shoulder. I always have said, and I say still, I never met Miss Kate's equal for pretty ways; they were just part and parcel of herself."

"Dear old Jane!" she said. "You have been very good to me, and very patient. I wonder," and she lifted her head and pushed back the soft brown hair, "I wonder, Jane, if it will be very long before I am—happy—again?"

"Heaven forbid, my dear," I cried. "You have everything to make you so."

"I know that," she said—"I know it too well. Every day of my life I have enumerated my blessings. But it is terrible to me—oh, Jane, you can't think *how* terrible—to feel I can't laugh just for laughing's sake. I can't

care about the things that used to please me so, and sunshine, and music, and any story with real feeling in it—they all seem to me so infinitely sadder than ever they have seemed before. But it can't last, Jane, can it? It's impossible that it should last?"

"Quite impossible, my dear," I answered her, stroking back the rich, dusky hair with loving hand as though she were my little charge once more, not a great lady with every good gift of fortune in her keeping.

"Do you know," she said presently, "I believe people like to pose as martyrs, even to themselves. It seems to make life more—interesting. Perhaps," and her voice dropped into sudden softness again, "that is the reason why unhappy loves are almost always faithful."

"Oh, my dear," I said, "it is only when we are young that we think so much of happiness. Believe me, it is better to have a little comfort that lasts, than a great joy that is soon over."

"I dare say you are right," she said. "We think and talk a great deal of happiness, and, after all, what is it? Only a question of a little less misery in each life. We dream of it—we never realise it."

"No," I said. "Doubtless it is not meant we should."

"After to-night," she said wearily, "I must not indulge in sentiment. Well," and she laughed bitterly, "there will be no one to afford me the luxury of confidence. I must keep the children with me; they will help. If only Reggie would not talk so much about—him."

She rose and went back to the couch, and leant her cheek somewhat wearily against the soft cushions.

"It all seems so long ago," she said; "so terribly long ago. Feelings age one more than years, do they not, Jane?"

"It seems so strange," she went on, presently, "to feel like this when one has been unmoved and indifferent so long, that one had no fear of—of such a possibility. I had heard the girls at school talk of their loves, and sentimentalise over their emotions. But it always seemed to me that I hadn't any. I couldn't understand it's being in any one man's power to make you happy or—wretched. And my future seemed all so safe and settled, and now——"

A little low sob choked the words, but her eyes were dry and strangely bright.

"I despise him enough, Heaven knows," she said. "Oh, why did he do it? Why? It was so cruel, so heartless, so——"

"So manlike," I said bitterly.

She dropped her hand and looked at me. "Poor Jane," she said, "you have suffered too. It seems the lot of women, doesn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it always will be as long as they have anything to do with men."

"You loved your husband and he treated you badly. Your fate is worse than mine. John is so good to me—so good. That is just the one reproach my life is always uttering."

"I think, my dear," I said, "we have talked enough of this for one day. Try and rouse yourself to your old life and duties. It will be hard, but it is better than giving way to morbid fancies and dreams that, after all, can come to nothing."

"Oh, wise old Jane!" she said, with something of the old bright mockery in glance and voice. "Of course, I know you are right. But I am only taking a last indulgence. After to-day——"

Then suddenly her head sank on her clasped hands. The words ended with a sob, like that of a little child over a task that it finds too hard.

"Oh, don't, my dear," I entreated, "don't. I would rather see you mad, furious, passionate, as you were last night, than—this."

"I can't help it Jane," she said. "I am

weaker than I thought, and this is a new experience; I am not used to it—yet."

So I let her cry. What else could I do, knowing, too, that a woman's tears are at once a safeguard and an outlet for her feelings; but all the same it wrung my heart to see her and to hear those wild, terrible, panting sobs that seemed to tear the very life out of her breast, and left her at last spent and exhausted, and utterly helpless, so that I could only lay her back on the couch, and watch her in silent misery as she rested there on the white pillows.

The next day I bade her good-bye. I was obliged to go to my new situation; and somehow, sorry as I was to leave her, I thought it would be better for her to have no one at hand to talk to about this matter.

It would surely wear itself out. She was such a proud, wilful little creature. It was impossible but that she should soon despise and hate a man who had treated her so shamefully as Mr. Tresyllion had done.

And then, all in a moment, like a lightning flash, something seemed to tell me that I had not been quite honest with her when I told her the story of Mrs. Cray. After all, he had not made love; it had been all on the other side. I

could not recall a single word of endearment or encouragement on his part.

Mrs. Cray had absolutely flung herself at his head; wooed him desperately, madly. He was young, impulsive, passionate. What could one expect of any man under such circumstances? The very hopelessness of his regard for Miss Kate might have driven him to the desperate remedy of seeking consolation in the arms of another woman. He would not have been the first who had done it.

Still, true or false, the story must be left now to serve its purpose. Better—a million times better—that she should think him worthless, than picture him as loving, suffering for her, dreaming of her, as she had dreamt of him.

"In a year," I told myself, "it will be all over and forgotten on both sides, and they will be glad of the escape. What could come of it? How would it end? Heaven keep them apart until the madness is conquered."

And it never occurred to me that it could be anything but conquered, or that the fact of conquering could be anything but a question of time for either, or for both.

It seems such a very easy thing to judge of other people, and to settle their affairs for them. But if it is easy, it is not often safe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MORE QUEER EXPERIENCES.

If living with Mrs. Cray was a "liberal education," I wonder what I ought to call my experience of Dr. Carneggie.

He was the strangest being I ever came across, and I suppose the cleverest. He lived in a queer, rambling house some miles distant from Launceston—a dreary, weird-looking place, for all the world like the picture of a haunted house in the Christmas numbers of the magazines. He had a surgery, and a laboratory, and Heaven knows what all, and almost all his time was spent in what he called "scientific experiments." He kept an old manservant, as queer as, but infinitely more uncouth than, himself. He was a Cornish man, by name of Zeal. Whether that was surname or Christian, I never could make out.

As far as I could judge, the doctor hadn't many patients, nor a very extensive practice.

could n had been there about a month, he one or f told me to go out in the queer old covered chaise he had, and call on several of them and report the cases to him. I thought it was a very odd thing to do, but I took the list, and set off accordingly.

The first patient I had to see was a Miss Crabapple, an old maid, who lived with a sister, older than herself, at a place called The Wyke, and who was suffering from chronic dyspepsia. I explained to them that my master was unwell, and not able to come out, but being anxious to know how they were—or, rather, how Miss Penelope was—had sent me.

They seemed to think it quite a natural thing to do, so I was soon at ease, and took down all the invalid's symptoms and complaints in a little note-book that Dr. Carneggie had given me. The two old ladies tried to pump me a good deal about my master; but I was careful to know nothing, and I believe they put me down as an enormously stupid person.

The younger Miss Crabapple was a very religious person, and put many strange questions to me about the welfare of my soul, and where I expected to go, and if I lived my life in this world as preparation for another.

I can't say I found that visit very pleasant,

and I wondered if she talked like that to the doctor.

I have often wondered why people who have "got religion"—as they express it—are so extremely unpleasant towards those who have not, or who they think have not.

But to return to my patients. After leaving the Miss Crabapples, I had to see one or two farmers' wives and report of them. Then I drove home by the wild, moorland road, thinking what a queer world this is, and how strangely the pattern of human life has varied since the first man and woman accepted their birthright.

When I had had my tea, the doctor sent for me into his study, where he generally sat of an evening with his dog for company. By the way, that dog certainly deserves a description. It was a small, white, silky-haired creature, with the very oddest and most uncanny face I ever saw on an animal. The eyes were enough to haunt one. So big, so soft, so pathetic, and with such a look in them as if she were longing to tell you something, and almost breaking her heart because you could not understand her.

The doctor called her "Shame;" if one ever heard such a name for a dog! He had the queerest ideas about her. He told me she had a human soul imprisoned in her because of the

evil that soul had done in some previous existence. And he also said he was going to find out what the evil was, and who she had been; and I solemnly declare that, when he said it, that dog hung its head and crept away under the couch to hide itself, for all the world as if it knew, and were ashamed of what he might discover.

But this is nothing to the way he used to talk, sometimes making my very blood run cold with terror, and yet it was so interesting and so extraordinary that I could not help listening again and again.

He gave me very different ideas of life and death, I must say. Indeed, death, according to him, was a word without meaning, for he would prove that nothing could die—that is to say, cease to exist; that new forms and new life were ceaselessly springing from the decay we perceived with our earth senses, and that every one and everything lived again, and again, and again, in some shape or other.

"There is an inner world," he would say, "where nature keeps her stores. They are far more wonderful and varied than those which she supplies for more material regions. Could man, as he now is, pierce the veil which separates his world from that other, he would perceive the cause of all things, the beginning of

all things, the effect of all things. He would learn, too, that he has to hold himself responsible for his thoughts and actions, and that they and their consequences do not end upon the earth plane he inhabits, but extend into the regions of that other world, and imprint there their ineffaceable records. Nay, more than that they affect the currents passing ever to and fro in those astral regions, and act for the welfare or detriment of others to an extent that is almost infinite."

But when he would go on to say that all those impure and wicked thoughts became "beings" in that inner world, as he called it, monsters of evil who peopled space with shapes as hideous and debasing as we picture devils, I grew fairly terrified.

Of course, I could not understand half he said, but he liked to have me to listen; and sometimes he would come into the kitchen and talk away to old Zeal and myself by the hour, and quote Paracelsus, and Hellenbach, and Leibnitz, and other extraordinary men who seemed to me able to prove that everything was nothing, and nothing was everything, and that "I" was not "I," but only thought so; and that the earth wasn't a bit like what it looked, because *we thought* it looked as it was;

whereas the other people in that "inner world" saw it quite differently. That humanity had created its own demons by force of its own tendency to evil; and these demons fastened on it, and preyed upon it, and made it viler and viler, according to the increase of thought that peopled space so recklessly.

I am simply putting this down as I wrote it at the time. No doubt wiser heads than mine can understand what it all means. I am afraid I shall have to be "evoluted" a good many more times before my nature and mind will be capable of taking it in.

He would talk about renunciation till it seemed quite an easy thing, as well as a noble one; of pain that was almost pleasure, strained to one point of endurance; of pleasure that was absolute pain, viewed from another; of a life that seemed objectless, heartless, alone in all, yet living for all in a wider and greater sense than most men comprehend.

But sometimes he would have wild, fierce moods, that terrified me; and then only old Zeal could manage him. And I used to wonder if there was not some dark secret in his life—something that had turned him into the morose, eccentric being he had become.

He seldom spoke well of women, and I often

wondered why he had engaged me; but I suppose he had his reasons.

Now and then I heard from Miss Kate. She was going abroad for the winter, she told me; somewhere on the south coast of France. She never mentioned Mr. Tresyllion's name, or in any way alluded to that stormy scene when she had given herself up to "memory," as she said, for the last time. In this quiet place, so far removed from the noise and life of the great world, I heard nothing and learnt nothing of the people whose names had been so familiar to me at Mrs. Cray's. I often wondered about them, about her, about Mr. Tresyllion; but I was learning to take life quietly, and wait for events, and I know that if it was destined I should meet or see them again, I should surely do so.

I sometimes thought Dr. Carneggie could not really be quite right in his mind. Perhaps too much study had turned his brain. I shall never forget one night, when he told me that that queer little dog of his had been a woman some two hundred years before, and that he had loved her, and she had been false to him; and now, for her treachery and vileness, she was condemned to take a lower form; but for all that she had the same eyes and the same look; and now, by her fidelity and devotion, she might raise

herself in the scale, and next time she came to earth would, in all probability, be a woman again.

Of course I used to listen to him quite gravely; but I often wondered whether an asylum wasn't the fittest place for him; and after Christmas I couldn't stand it any more, but left and went to London again. I didn't know where Miss Kate was; but I had saved enough money to keep me going till I found something else to do.

I went to Mrs. Jefferson's and told her the story of my last place; and she was as kind as ever, and said no doubt her husband would be able to get me a caretaker's place again; and in a week's time he did.

It was a queer little house, and stood in a side street leading out of one of the big West End Squares. It had been empty a long time, and, I heard afterwards, had the reputation of being haunted. But I never knew that, though I must say there were queer noises and sounds all over the place; but I put them down to rats, and slept none the worse for them. I used to work, and read, and write up my Confessions, as I called them, and altogether was very well contented to feel I was my own mistress again.

I had been several weeks in the house, and no one had ever come to look at it in spite of

notice-boards and bills in the windows, when, one evening, just near dusk, I heard the bell ring. I went up to the front door, and there stood a small, queer little figure, a girl, as far as size, but with a woman's face, as I saw it in the gas-light—the oddest-looking person, and so queerly dressed!

Her voice was sharp, and had an odd twang about it that I couldn't make out; but as she soon told me she was an American, I put it down to that. She wanted to see the house, so I took her over it, and she seemed delighted with the dark, odd-shaped rooms and queer nooks and corners, and winding stairs, and I'm sure she talked enough for twenty people. I never heard such a chatterer in my life.

She had such an odd way, too, of peering about; and then she would say something and appear to listen for an answer, with her eyes up-raised and her face pale and eager. Then she would turn to me and say:

"'They' think it will do," or "'they' say I had better take it," until at last I began to think she must be demented.

However, it was no business of mine. She had the agent's card, and started off to see him and settle the matter; and I wasn't sorry to see the last of her.

Next day she came again, and the agent with her; and then she told me it was settled. She was going to take the house, and wanted to come in at once. Of course there was the usual question: "Would I clean it and put it in order?" and I agreed to do so, and in a week's time it was quite straight, and the furniture settled.

Not that that was much to boast of. I think it was mostly second-hand, and bad at that.

The little woman—whose name, by the way, was Miss Anatesta Justinia Potts—seemed very excited about her house; but I'm sure a drearier or more tasteless one it would have been hard to find. Dear me, how she used to flit about, for all the world like a restless little bird, and chatter till it made my head ache to listen to her!

I soon found out what she was—a spiritualist. A medium and clairvoyante, so she said, and a great personage in America on account of her psychic gifts. I wondered if she was so much thought of there that she hadn't stayed, because I didn't see what she was going to do in Engand. However, she told me she knew a great many people, and she sent out cards stating she would be "At Home" on certain evenings and afternoons for "séances" or consultations; and I was so curious and so interested about it all that I

accepted her offer to stay on, and take care of the house and manage things generally, for she had no more notion of housekeeping than a baby, and none of her "spiritual" friends seemed able to teach her common-sense.

Sometimes, when she held a "séance," she used to let me stay in a tiny sort of room, curtained off from what she called her "receiving apartment," and I must say I was astonished at the things that went on, and more astonished, I think, at the gravity and attention of the sitters. Grave, old, bearded men would come and listen to those raps, and ask questions by the alphabet, for all the world as if it were of life-and-death importance. Well, perhaps it was—to them. And there would be writing, and playing of musical instruments, and banging of furniture; and, really, I can't describe all that went on. I suppose it was very wonderful. Only, I was stupid enough to always ask, "What is the good of it?"

They learnt nothing; they never seemed to get on any further. The answers were sometimes very silly, and sometimes all wrong; and it did not seem a very dignified thing for "spirits" to come back to this world for no higher purpose than playing tricks that any conjurer or clown could have done a million times better.

However, they seemed all very happy and delighted; and as for Miss Anatesta Justinia, she would go hopping about like a little draggle-tailed sparrow, and chirping away about "the dear speeruts," as she called them, or "our sweet friends," until I wonder they didn't all laugh at her.

However, there was one thing about the little woman that really was wonderful, and that was her "clairvoyant" faculties.

It was no sham or nonsense—she would just hold a person's hand, and then go off into a sort of trance, and presently begin to speak—not in her own voice, but quite a different one. And then she would tell them everything about themselves—their past, their present, even their future, if they wished.

She never remembered, herself, what she had said. Perhaps that was just as well; for once or twice when I was in the little room, unknown either to her or the sitter, I heard some very queer things indeed—things that I'm sure the enquirer never imagined any other person was aware of. However, I never betrayed any confidence, and I'm not going to relate any of them now, except that special one which seems to belong to the plot of this story, and that, I think, deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CRUEL TRUTH

It was quite dark one winter afternoon when I heard a ring at the bell, and, on answering it, found a lady standing at the door. She was wrapped in a long, fur-lined cloak that quite concealed her figure, and wore a thick, black veil.

"Is Miss Potts at home?" she asked, in a low hurried voice.

"Yes, madam," I said. "Have you an appointment?"

"N—o," she said, "I came on chance. I—I have heard of her from a friend. If she is disengaged, perhaps she will see me?"

I said I would ask, and showed her into one of the queer little rooms that led out of the hall.

I could not think what it was about her that

struck me as familiar—her voice, or her movements—but, despite her disguise, it seemed to me that I had seen her and known her before this afternoon.

Miss Anatesta, as she liked me to call her, said she would see the visitor, so I showed her into the usual "mystic chamber;" but, overpowered by a tormenting curiosity, I slipped into the little inner room which was curtained off from it, and which had a door of exit on to the kitchen stairs.

There was only one lamp burning on the table, and I saw Miss Anatesta rise and survey her visitor with her usual quick, bird-like glance.

"What is it you wish?" she said. "A *séance*, or to see me?"

"I heard," said the visitor, "that you are a clairvoyante. I—I am anxious to test your powers. I have a great wish to know something, and if you could tell me by means of your gift——"

"Why, certainly," said Miss Anatesta, cheerfully. "Nothing in the world easier. Sit down there"—she pointed to a low chair beside the couch—"and, if you've no objection, lift up your veil. I should like to see your eyes, that's all; and I must ask you to hold one of my

hands. No, you needn't remove your glove. Ever seen this business before?"

"No," said the lady, in a low, nervous voice as she raised the thick veil, and threw it back from her face.

I saw it then in the lamplight. I started, and almost cried out. It was Mrs. Cray. She was dressed in mourning; and she looked years older than when I had seen her last—sad, pale, careworn, anything but happy.

Meanwhile Miss Anatesta, after one of her sharp, quick glances, leant back on the cushions of the couch and began to yawn.

"I always begin like that," she said. "They send me to sleep, you know. I shan't be long this evening, I guess."

"They?" echoed Mrs. Cray, as if surprised.

"Yes—my friends—the spirits. I have two guides. One tells me the past, one the future. Which do you want to know?"

"Both," she said, eagerly.

"Well—you musn't be frightened; for I can't wake up till they let me. So I'll tell you what to do. The first guide will speak to you through me. The second you must question. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said, nervously.

"I'm—I'm going—off," said Miss Anatesta,

with another prodigious yawn. "Mind, I shall know nothing of what is said to you. I never recollect when I'm out of trance. Oh—h—h——!"

Another yawn. Her head sank back; her eyes closed. I could see Mrs. Cray's face, white and anxious, watching that curious, little, wizened-up physiognomy. Then quite suddenly Miss Anatesta began to speak. The words ran on like a stream, without break or flaw, and were uttered in a voice quite unlike that of the clairvoyante herself.

"You were married ten years ago. You have no children. Your life has been changeful, erratic, marked by impulses that have swayed you and ruled you far too often. You were not happy in your married life. Your husband did not suit you. He was good, kind; but not sympathetic; not the nature to rule yours. You found this out very soon. Your life had other resources. I see Fame, of a kind. No; I should call it success. Success in some work or occupation you took up. It engrossed you for a time; but you wearied even of that. It is your nature to weary soon of things, as of people. You began to care for another man—to love him as you had never loved before——"

"True enough, Heavens knows!" sobbed the listener, as there came a pause in the flow of words.

"You loved him so passionately that you could not hide it from him; but he—did not love you."

Another pause. I saw how ghastly white her face turned; the quick clenching of the hand that had lain so quiet on her lap. But she said nothing.

"He pretended he did," the merciless voice went on; "but it was partly to save you humiliation, and partly to drive away from his own heart and memory the passion he felt for another woman."

There was a silence, brief and portentous. Then came the low, fierce tones of jealousy and fear.

"Who—was that other woman?"

"I—I cannot tell you. I can see him and I can see you; but I cannot find her."

"Go on."

"Your husband died two months ago. He never knew you had deceived him. Since you heard the news, you have been in hopes that your lover would marry you."

"Tell me for Heaven's sake, if you can—*will* he marry me?" she panted.

"It is of the future you ask now," came another voice, slow, sonorous, deep, and strangely impressive. "Beware—happy are those who know not, and live in hope and for sake of hope. Better fear and doubt than the certainty of misery foredoomed, and for which you will wait in anguish as the criminal for stroke of the executioner."

"No; I care not. I must know."

"He will not marry you," came the answer, calm and still, and given with an absolute conviction that carried its own weight even to the passionate, rebellious heart that refused to believe.

"My God!" came in one tortured gasp from the trembling creature's lips. She sank back on the chair, ghastly and trembling. I feared she was going to faint. "Oh, why did I ask—why?" she moaned, and snatched her hand from the "clairvoyante's" grasp, and wrung them wildly together. "But I don't believe it; I can't. He did love me. I know he did."

"You drugged his senses. You made him forget honour, and decency, and self-respect. You tempted and he—yielded; partly because he was a man; chiefly to save you some of the humiliation you merited. He has no regard for

you now, only a great weariness, a little pity, and some contempt. He avoids you, does he not?"

"Yes," she muttered, hoarsely. "But I won him once. Surely my power is not quite gone? I can win him back again?"

"You never will," came the stern response. "Of all dead things none is so utterly dead as a passion born of caprice; of the senses, loathed and wearied of for its ignoble bondage ere even its first kisses are cold. You have seen it, written it; you know it. Why, then, do you hope to hold this man now he is wearied and cold?"

"I love him," she moaned, as if speaking to herself out of her own misery. "Oh, Heaven! how I love him. More than honour, fame, and life. I have sacrificed so much for him; and now—now——"

"Now he is only proving one of the truths of life. All men are so. You wooed— and he —despised what was too easily won. Had you been wise——"

"Oh," she cried, passionately, "cease. As if one were ever that when one—loves!"

It seems absolute bathos, but, after those wild words, that storm of grief and humiliation, came

another string of yawns. Miss Anatesta Justinia rubbed her eyes, opened them, received her fee for the interview, and I was summoned to show the veiled figure out of the front door.

She had not once looked at me. I suppose her mind was too full of misery to notice anyone, or anything. But I did not envy her as she stepped out into the lighted street and stood for a moment there, looking about her in a blind and helpless way.

Then she hailed a cab, got in, and I heard her give the man the old familiar address in Bruton Street.

I shut the door and went back to my kitchen, and I must confess to feeling a great respect for Miss Anatesta's powers, since I had seen them so satisfactorily proved.

I can't, of course, explain how she did it; but I am absolutely convinced there was no trick, or sham, about her clairvoyance.

It was a gift, or power of her own, and a very remarkable one. She knew nothing of Mrs. Cray; yet she had told her all this history as if she was reading it off a book.

I was astonished to hear that she was a widow, and could well imagine what a raging curiosity to know the future at any cost, must have brought her to Miss Anatesta. Poor

thing! It would have been far better to have remained in ignorance, than to suffer the agony she now did.

It seemed to me so foolish, so utterly senseless and irrational. It only shows what fools love can make of people; for, as I said before, Mrs. Cray was a clever woman, and a highly-gifted woman, and yet—to think that she could sink to this!

For my part, I would suffer anything in the present sooner than lift the veil that hides the future. Surely, hope is a better gift that any power to see beyond the moment, however sad, however hard it is. I know my queer little mistress herself has often said to me: "Jane, for all that I might know and learn of what is in store for me, I will not ask. Let the future come to me as friend or foe, I care not. If I am to be happy, let the years bring me their gift. If misfortune threatens, let ignorance blind-fold my eyes so that they see not the coming fate. Believe me, there is true wisdom in the words of the man who wrote of life, that its best gift is to hope; its worst—"to know."

Of course I might supply any amount of stories about the goings on at Miss Anatesta's *séances*, and clairvoyant sittings. But I suppose they would only interest a very small class

of people; and, out of all the records I have kept, I am only selecting those that go to make up my story.

For, indeed, it is very wonderful how just a certain number of people seem entangled in the threads of it for any purpose; and how again and again they came in my way, and played their part on the stage of life where I was audience, until, at last, they made a set of characters and a complete history.

It only shows how small the world is after all, or else that certain people are bound to meet certain people again and again, as if they revolved in a circle. If I had been clever enough to take in all that I heard from the doctor and Miss Anatesta, I might have learnt the true secrets of "cause and effect;" but I confess they got far beyond me, and I used to feel rather dazed when I began to consider myself as an "Ego," that had existed for thousands and thousands of years, and learnt that there were such things as Psychic bodies, and Elementals, and astral forms, and faculties that might be developed into almost magical powers for good or for evil. They made out that the construction of the world and the origin of man might be altogether different from what I had learnt in the Bible, or at Sunday-school, or from

teachers and ministers—in fact, that everything I believed and accepted might be turned topsy-turvy without affording the slightest satisfaction to myself, or the least benefit to those who upset it.

I therefore concluded that in my case "ignorance should be bliss," and refused to hear or understand any of these mysteries. Indeed, I gradually began to get so used to Miss Anatesta's "séances," and trances, and queer talks, that I paid no more attention to them, or to her, than if she had been ordering the dinner, or the breakfast.

I remained with her for six months, and then she took it into her head to start off to America, and sub-let the house to a widower, with a large family, who did not require me, as he had his own servants.

So once more I was on the look-out for employment, and could scarcely flatter myself that I should secure so extraordinary or interesting a place again.

CHAPTER XX.

"THE LAST VERSE OF THE SONG."

I MIGHT, of course, relate a good many incidents that happened after leaving Miss Anatesta; but, somehow, they haven't much to do with the principal characters in my story, and I don't suppose would be of much interest to anyone but myself.

It was quite a year afterwards that I saw Miss Kate again, though she had always kept me informed of her health and her whereabouts, and the progress of the children. When I received the letter that told me she was in town, and would like to see me, I was still at my old occupation of caretaking, and must say was beginning to get a little tired of it. The fact of knowing my dear young mistress was in town again, and that I should see her pretty face once more, quite cheered me up. She was living in Grosvenor Street, and I went there the

evening of the day on which I had received her letter, having secured a young person, a neighbour, to take charge of the house while I left it; for one of my experiences is, that if any one does call to look at an empty house, they are pretty sure to do it just as you've run out on an errand, or to fetch yourself some necessary—caretakers, so far as I can judge, not being above creature-comforts more than any other class of person, though agents appear to think once they're in the house they ought to become "fixtures," like the blinds, and curtain-poles, and grates.

I must confess to feeling a little nervous as I sat in the boudoir, waiting for Miss Kate. I could not help thinking of when I had last seen her, now two years ago, and wondering if she was changed at all, and if she had got over that unfortunate fancy that had once threatened to wreck her life.

Presently, I heard some one singing. Then —a light foot on the stairs, and she ran into the room, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling; just her old, bright, pretty, merry self, and just the old, sweet, familiar greeting:

"Oh, my dear, dear old Jane, how are you?"

My heart seemed to give a great throb of gladness and relief as I caught her in my arms and

kissed her. For a moment or two I could not speak; but soon I grew calmer, and could sit quietly down and listen to the accounts of foreign scenes and foreign travel that she gave me. The boys were at a school in the country, and she and Mr. Carruthers had just come up for the season.

"But that's not what I wanted to see you about, Jane," she said, presently. "I don't like the idea of your living that comfortless life you do, so I'm going to ask you to be my housekeeper while I'm in town. Of course at Templecombe there's Mrs. Riley, who's a fixture in the Carruthers family; but here it's different. And when we are not in town, you can stay and take care of the house, if you will, so that at least you've a home always ready, and need not drift about as you've been doing so long."

I suppose I should have been a fool to refuse such an offer. So it is scarcely necessary to say I accepted it; and, after a long talk, we agreed that I should go to my agent next day, and tell him he must find some one else to take charge of the house.

I went home very happy that night. We never alluded to our last meeting, nor, so far as I could see, did Miss Kate seem to have a single recollection of it. Mr. Tresyllion's name

was never mentioned, and I thought probably she had long forgotten him, and the foolish romance that had once made her so unhappy.

She looked as young, as pretty, as mischievous as ever. Her laugh was as light, her words as merry as those of the Kate of old. Only now and then I fancied there was a hard look about her face when it was in repose, and a more frequent lapse into cynicism and sarcasm when she spoke of people, than she had once used to display. But these changes and flashes were so swift that I could scarcely be sure they were real; and when her husband came in, and she told him about me, and stood there with her hand slipped through his arm and teased him in her pretty, wilful way, and I saw his adoring look at her as she talked or laughed, or moved in restless, excited fashion about the room, I thought to myself: "Oh, thank Heaven! she is safe and happy still."

I can safely say I had never been so comfortable in my life as when I took my place as housekeeper to Miss Kate. I had my own room. My duties were very light, and my pretty, sweet, young mistress seemed as if she could never make enough of me.

Not a day passed but she would run into my

room for a chat, or have me up to her boudoir, and tell me all her gay doings and how she enjoyed the season and all its amusements and distractions. And still, like a secret—shared—but unspoken, that *one* name lay between us, with all its memories, and all the consciousness that it was in our thoughts.

It was not an unfrequent occurrence for me to sit up in her dressing-room one or two nights in the week, so that her maid, a fine, French young person, with more vanity than sense, might go to bed and save her complexion, as she expressed it. Then I used to do the little services of maid to my young lady as in the old days, and she would chatter away to me while I brushed her hair, or folded up her lovely gowns, and wraps, and dainty laces.

One night—it was in the early part of June, I remember—she came home from some entertainment, or ball, and I was waiting up for her in the dressing-room.

It was not late—about one o'clock, I think—when I heard the carriage drive up. The footman opened the door, and I heard Mr. Carruthers go into the smoking-room, and presently Miss Kate came into the bedroom which opened out of the room where I was waiting.

I rose from the chair and laid aside the book

I had been reading, or dozing over, and then walked over to the door, dividing the two rooms, which stood ajar.

She was standing before the toilet-table, and I saw her face reflected in the glass. What was there in it? Some look—something which, like a flash, carried me back to the day when she had torn off her pretty gold-hued gown, and faced me with a woman's sad and shamed confession of weakness.

For an instant my heart seemed to stand still. Then she caught sight of me in the glass, and the expression of her face changed.

"You—Jane?" she questioned, in a hurried, absent sort of way. "Where is Félise?"

"Gone to bed, ma'am," I answered. "She said she wasn't feeling well."

She made no remark, only threw off the long, creamy wrap of satin and fur that covered her bare, soft shoulders, and walked into the dressing-room. I followed. She held out her arms, and I took off the glittering bracelets that had decked them, and unlaced her gown, and threw her dressing-robe round her, while she seated herself for me to brush out her hair.

She did not speak for some time, though usually she chattered to me from the moment I began toilet operations to the moment I finished.

I brushed and combed the dusky, rippled mass of hair that fell to her waist in one luxuriant tangle, and from time to time I looked at her face as I saw it through that lovely, dusky veil, and wondered what she was thinking about.

At last she looked up and caught my eye. I saw a little hot flush rise in her cheeks.

"Oh, Jane!"—she cried suddenly, and then stopped; and her hands went up to her face and she hid it from me, and her breast heaved with a quick, stormy sigh beneath the soft lace and cashmere of her wrapper.

"Miss Kate," I said gravely and almost harshly, "you have met—him—again. I saw it in your face the moment you entered the other room."

Then her hands dropped; she lifted her head and shook back the rich, dusky hair, and her eyes were like stars—so large they were and bright. And oh, how sweet she looked, and young, and fair, and yet—how sad.

"Yes, Jane," she said quietly, "I have met him again, after two years—two long, dreary, empty years that have only served to show me more plainly than ever what a mistake I made in marrying—John Carruthers."

I dropped the soft, bright tress of hair. I simply stood and looked in a dazed, stupid way

at the mirror—the mirror which showed me her face and mine.

There was something in the words, or, rather, the quiet, despairing way in which they were spoken, which seemed to tell me that remonstrance or rebuke were alike useless.

She had met her fate—as many and many a man and woman does—too late. That was all the story, as yet. How much more of it was still to follow I could not say; I dared not think.

"Don't fancy I am going to be foolish," she went on, her voice cold, and stern, and unlike itself. "That is over and done with, thank goodness. But, Jane, badly as he treated me in the old days, he has not—forgotten. I had my triumph to-night. He can suffer still, and I can make him; at any hour, at any moment, I can deal out to him the shame and humiliation he made me bear once."

"It is a dangerous experiment," I said gravely. "Oh, my dear, be warned by me. Avoid him; shun him, cost what it may. You fancy you are safe; but, indeed, you are playing with fire, and the scorch and the pain of it will make themselves felt, believe me. If—if you loved your husband, it would not matter; but you have no safeguard, if, as you say, you repent your mar-

riage, and repent it because another man has taught you what you have missed in it——"

"Dear old Croaker," she said laughing, and looking back at me with bright, dark eyes, in which a strange and feverish light burned and flashed. "Always the same wise old Jane, with warnings and prophecies. Don't be afraid of me —now. A woman doesn't require to be taught such a lesson as mine twice. I learned it very perfectly. I am not afraid to practise its results."

"Tell me," I said, "how you met."

"It was not very romantic," she said with a little, hard laugh. "I have often thought we might meet. It was to be expected that we should do so, soon or late; but when we did, it was never as I had pictured or imagined it. I have been to an 'At Home,' at Lady A——'s, to-night. Lady A—— is one of those women who run after 'somebodies,' and Mr. Tresyllion is a great deal of a 'someone' now. His books are the rage of the season, and he, consequently, is run after by everyone. Well, I was in the refreshment-room with a tepid youth of the London masher type, who had languidly exerted himself to bring me an ice, and then to remark that it was a 'wa-am evening,' or something equally brilliant. I think our conversation had proceeded no further than that, when I heard a

voice behind me say; 'What may I bring you —ice or claret-cup?' I turned slightly, but the voice needed no confirmation. Instinct had told me whose it was. We looked straight at one another. I can answer for myself, I did not change colour. My face was just as it always is; but he—he grew white as death. Then he bowed. It was not his place to do so—first; but I overlooked the breach of etiquette, and the return was so slight that I think before he procured that ice, or had become aware of the fact that his companion desired it, he had also become aware that, between the woman he had known two years before and the woman he met to-night, there was a difference that defied explanation, and disarmed any attempt he might have made to justify himself, or his conduct, to her. No doubt my mild escort wondered that an ice-cream could impart such brilliance and fluency to the conversation of a woman who had been about as dull as himself a quarter of an hour previously; but he beamed, and melted, and became quite entertaining, and I passed out of the room on his arm, without a word or glance in response to the pleading eyes which had scarcely left my face."

"And was that—all?" I asked.

"Not quite. There was music going on up-

stairs. Not long after I had come back to the drawing-room, I saw that he was going to sing. You know his way of old, Jane—the sort of careless gesture that swept every one and everything aside, as he would seat himself at the piano. There was a large mirror opposite. I could see his face, but he could not see me, or even guess if I was looking, or listening. I wondered what he would sing. I heard the old, familiar, ringing touch, the clear, full sound of the chords, and then—then, Jane——"

"Yes?" I said, for she suddenly bent her head on her hands, and a little sob escaped her.

"Oh!" she cried, with sudden, passionate wrath, as she sprang to her feet, and began pacing fiercely to and fro the room. "Oh, Jane, Jane, it was shameful, cruel, wicked of him—he sang those words he had written to me—do you remember? I told you about them once, when —when we spoke about him, and——"

"And Mrs. Cray," I interposed quietly. "Yes, Miss Kate, I remember—'My Lady of Moods.'"

"That was it," she said, the colour flaming in her cheek, and her great eyes flashing through the angry tears—"and he sang it there—to me —*me*—before all those people!—sang it so that they hushed their idle talk to listen; sang it so

that it should ring in my ears, Jane, till I grow mad, or forget, or—die!"

"Oh, Miss Kate!" I entreated, "don't talk so wildly; don't——"

"I can't help it," she cried, "I can't—help—it. Music is the one thing that affects and thrills me, and carries me away. And you know his voice. Fancy it pleading, praying, thrilling in passionate entreaty to one woman whom alone, among a crowd of hundreds, he chose should hear, and listen—and understand. That was the worst of it, Jane. I—I could not help myself. I had to listen—I had to understand. And the new verse—the verse I had never heard till to-night—told me a whole story in itself. I can't forget it. Would to heaven I could!"

"It was ungenerous, unmanly of him," I said bitterly. "But it is only on a par with everything else he has done where you are concerned. For Heaven's sake, for the sake of your own peace of mind, Miss Kate, don't let your thoughts dwell on him. What good can come of it to either of you?"

"None," she said, wearily, "none, Jane. You are quite right. But thought cannot be fettered, or memory either; and though I hate him now, and though I feel I could not bear to touch his hand, or look ever into his eyes again, yet he has

been able to make me desperately unhappy—to-night."

"But to-morrow," I said, "you will find it easier."

She did not answer for a moment; only stood there and looked at me with eyes that were very mournful, and a face that was very pale. Then she lifted both arms, and pushed back the cloud of her hair; and so standing and holding it, for all the world like some lovely little picture just stepping from its frame, she began to sing softly, half to herself, half to me, the words of that song she had heard:

"Alas! for the life and the heart and the soul of me,
All that has gone with a day that is done.
She whom I love so—possessing the whole of me,
Leaves me the shadows, and flies to the sun.
Oh, for a tear of her,
Oh, for a fear of her,
Oh, for a day or an hour that was dear of her!
Never a dream but is haunted by smile of her,
Never a thought but recalls every wile of her.
Heart of my heart—she has broken the heart of me,
Soul of my soul—who will never be part of me,
She whom I love—but will never be love of me,
Song of my sorrows—My Lady of Moods!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A NIGHT OF MORALISING.

As the song ended, her arms fell; a change swept over her. A little ironic laugh parted her lips, and chimed on the stillness.

"Did I say I was—unhappy?" she said. "Nonsense, don't believe me, Jane. I am not; I—I won't be. I mean to enjoy life as I never enjoyed it before. Why shouldn't I? Haven't I everything the heart of woman can desire —wealth, position, luxury, love, friendship? And isn't my good old John worth a hundred fickle flirts, with handsome faces and inconstant hearts?"

"I should say so, my dear," I answered, gravely. "But I'm afraid you may not always think it."

"I shall think it," she said, "if I make up my mind."

She linked her hands together and stood for a moment or two quite still, as if thinking out the subject in its gravity and importance.

The attitude was so pretty, and the little

thing looked so sweet that I felt my eyes grow dim as I looked at her—wondering a little, too, in my own mind that the childish, dimpled loveliness of face and figure had so little altered, despite the changes that wifehood and maternity so often bring.

"I wish," I said at last, breaking the silence that was so serious and, perhaps—momentous, "I wish, Miss Kate, you would make up your mind to avoid this man. It is the sentiment of the aquaintance that is so dangerous. There are memories in the background—and he—he is very fascinating, I know. Remember, older and wiser women than yourself have bent to the charm. Miss Kate, shall I tell you—something?"

"Yes Jane," she said quickly, turning paler as she looked up and met my eyes.

"He has given up Mrs. Cray"—I said, "and she is a widow now."

"A widow!" she started, and the colour came in a warm, bright flood to her face. "Is that true, really—and—and you think he ought to have married her?"

"Think," I said bitterly, "of course I think it. She wrecked her whole life for him. But, there, that is always the way. What a man has, he ceases to value! If women would only think—would only remember——"

"Don't you think," she said, sadly, "that it must be very hard to do that—always? There are feelings that are too strong for one; it is impossible to keep cool and self-controlled. Just up to a certain point one can do it, but beyond——"

"Miss Kate," I cried, in sudden terror, "it has surely never gone—beyond—with you?"

"You need not ask," she said wearily. "I have shown you my whole heart, Jane. You are the earliest friend I have. You know me as no one else knows me. It has been hard, but I think I have won the battle at last; and if I weary you with my confidences, Jane, and if I am as wilful and troublesome as the child you used to scold and punish, you must be patient with me. Remember, I have no one to whom I can speak—to whom I dare speak, but you. And if I had to keep silence; if I had to brood, and brood, and remember, and regret; and fight always—always—the old, terrible conflict with my nature as I know it, with myself as I *am* —I think I should go mad, Jane, or—kill myself!"

And, looking at her, I thought so too.

I had no sleep that night; I could only think of my pretty dear—the child dearer to me in

her womanhood than ever she had been in her childhood—the one human creature in all the world whom I loved. To and fro, feverish and restless, I tossed, and memory brought back scene after scene in which she had played a part. All her pretty, bright ways, her mischief, and fun, her caprices, and whims, and the dare-devilry that ran through her actions, the recklessness which marked her impulses.

Would she ever change, and grow calm, and tame, and content? Would she ever come to be the sort of woman to whom her household arrangements, her servants' iniquities, her toilettes, her amusements, her visiting-list, and the engagements, distractions, and frivolities of society would be life and occupation? I felt sure she would not.

All the theories and speculations I had heard from Dr. Carneggie, and the little American spiritualist, came back to my mind.

Why should there be so much suffering? Why so much pain? Why so many tears, and sighs, and sorrows; so much torture for such poor results? I thought of scenes I had witnessed; of powers wrecked by wanton waste of body and mind; of men's strength sapped by infamous tempting; of genius turned to madness; of the selfishness of passion; the misery of lives

of the heart it calls its own. Oh, surely it must be a sight that makes angels weep—if, indeed, they interest themselves at all about the lives and troubles of poor humanity!

And what is the moral to this "tale of a sleepless night" as far as I and my story are concerned? I suppose just my fear of Miss Kate and Mr. Tresyllion's renewed acquaintance. For I did fear it; and perhaps all the more because I knew her so well, and knew that everthing that could most fascinate and attract her, was bound up in this one "edition of young manhood."

His looks, his manners, his great natural gifts —the strain of sentiment and romance that go to make up a nature at once poetic and melancholy, even in lighthearted youth—his supposed faithlessness, which had hurt her pride, and shown her the danger of the attraction she had deemed so innocent: all these set themselves in array, and seemed to warn me of danger. I knew he had not forgotten. I knew that the frail thread of attraction, which had bound him to another woman, had long since been snapped; and I knew that he would not and could not have written and sung those words she had repeated, unless some purpose had been in the background.

The refrain haunted even me. What, then, must it be to her—the inspiration and theme of it?

"Oh, for a tear of her,
Oh, for a fear of her,
Oh, for a day or an hour that was dear of her."

If he meant *that*, he might mean more. So much lay in his power, and Fate always lends herself to the aid of those whose loves seem to be marked—"impossible."

No wonder I could not sleep. No wonder I looked forward with dread to the days and weeks that loomed in the distance. I remembered that other season. I knew that it would be a sheer impossibility for Miss Kate to avoid him, unless he took the initiative and left town altogether.

How I wished he would! How I wished I had the courage to ask him! But I felt I could not compromise my mistress's dignity by such an act, or even add to his own vanity by letting him see I feared his attraction for her. No; there seemed nothing to be done but to let things take their course; and by the time I had arrived at this wise conclusion the dawn was lightening and broadening in the East, and I turned round and tried to get an hour's sleep before rising to perform the duties of the day.

CHAPTER XXII.

DANGER!

For some time after that night Miss Kate did not mention Mr. Tresyllion's name to me when I officiated as lady's-maid, or when she spoke of the various entertainments at which she was present. I watched her carefully—almost jealously. I noted a certain feverish restlessness about her; a craving for excitement; a fitful, unreal gaiety that told me of a mind but ill at ease.

However, I said nothing. I thought it best.

One morning she came into my room rather hurriedly. "Jane," she said, "I have just had a telegram from Mr. Carruthers. He says, he is going to bring an old friend to luncheon. Look at the name."

She handed me the paper and I glanced at it. This was the message: "Am bringing an old friend—Tresyllion, to luncheon, two p.m."

We looked at each other silently. Her face

was cold and very pale. "Is it fate, do you think?" she said ironically. "What is the use of my avoidance, or coldness?"

"I think," I said, "that he ought not to have accepted—ought not to have come."

"Ought—not to come!" she repeated, scoffingly. "Does a man ever resist the temptation that pleases him? You see he is determined to force me into meeting him. And—and Reggie is not here now."

"No," I answered. "What a pity. I wish he were. But, Miss Kate," I added, suddenly, "you could make an excuse. You need not come down to luncheon; it is easy to say you are not well."

"And so appear afraid to meet him," she said, her lip curling scornfully. "No, Jane. I won't give him the satisfaction of thinking that. I will face it as—as I have faced other meetings."

"You have seen him, sometimes, then?" I asked her, wondering a little how the pretty face could look so cold and proud, and the curved, red lips take such hard, stern lines.

"Seen him! Oh! yes. Spoken to him, taken his arm, gone down to dinner once with him; but this will be more difficult, Jane."

"Why, Miss Kate?"

"Oh," she said, impatiently, "don't you know? Can't you see that one can't treat a guest at one's own table, as one treats an acquaintance at another person's."

She paused, then said suddenly, with one of those rapid changes of mood that always made me wonder whether she would ever take anything very seriously:

"I know what I will do, Jane. I will put on my most unbecoming gown, and I will do my hair that way he used to hate—straight on my forehead; you know. When he sees me looking ugly, as well as indifferent, surely, surely he will give up trying to make me think of him—talk to him as—as in the old days."

I laughed. I could not help it.

"Oh, my dear Miss Kate," I said; "don't you know yourself better than to think gowns, or hair-dressing, could possibly make any difference to the opinion of any one who knew you? You cannot help your charm any more than you can help your prettiness."

"Indeed! Indeed, Jane!" she said, seriously. "You make a great mistake. I am not pretty; I never was. I have gone through life, of course endeavouring to make people believe so; but it is really only a question of colour and —arrangement. That's why I'm so particular

about my gowns, and my—well my surroundings. Don't you know some one once said that a clever woman always *contrives* situations, if she wishes to make a picture of herself in the mind of a man? Well, I don't know that I am particularly clever; but I have always contrived to leave picturesque memories of myself scattered about, and they serve quite as well as a reputation for actual beauty. It is quite usual for people—chiefly men, I allow—to say to me, 'The night you wore that yellow gown, or that pink gown, or stood against such and such a background'—or, 'The night you were leaning against those terra-cotta cushions on the big lounge, in Mrs. So-and-So's room;' or, 'When you stood in that conservatory, with the palms and azaleas behind you;' or something to that effect. You see, my charm consists in getting them to see me, not as I am *really*, but as part of a picture that is framed in their memory, associated with some touch of colour, music, romance. But in its way it is as artificial as the limelight to stage-beauty, or the rouge and antimony to the fading charms of sixty. People think I am pretty or charming, while really it is a mere matter of the blue, or pink, or yellow that formed my toilette, the backgrounds I chose so artfully, or the audacity of my words and

manners which made an impression, when a more beautiful, or clever, but less specious person has failed to do so."

I shook my head.

"You may say what you please, Miss Kate," I answered; "but I've known you too long not to know that there's something about you better than looks, or colours, or 'arrangements,' as you call them. Something difficult to forget. I am hardly likely to flatter you, my dear," I added sadly; "but I must say I feel sorry for any man who has once learned to care for you. There are hundreds of woman prettier, no doubt; cleverer, perhaps; but there is just *something* about you—I can't say what—that would always make you stand out alone, so that one would always remember you as having said something, or done something, or looked something different to what any of the other women had said, or done, or looked; something that made it difficult to forget you, even if one wanted to, I think."

"Oh," she said, with that odd little smile just shadowing her lips. "That is only just my artfulness, Jane, as I have been trying to impress upon you. It is so easy, so painfully easy, to leave that sort of impression, if women only knew. But as a rule they are too vain, or too

stupid, or too indifferent, and that is why they fail. So you see, if I look unbecoming, and am very stupid and uninteresting, I may yet succeed in disenchanting my undesired and undesirable —admirer."

"Perhaps," I suggested with some diffidence, "perhaps, Miss Kate, if you told your husband——"

"Told John!" she burst out stormily. "How could I! That is nonsense, Jane! What is there to tell — shadows, suspicions, fears, that may end in nothing? Oh, no, no. I could not humiliate myself to him by putting into words what—what I can scarcely allow myself to think."

"Then," I said quietly, "nothing remains to be done but accept his visits again; for you may be quite sure, Miss Kate, he won't rest content with only coming here once—more especially if Mr. Carruthers brings him."

She looked at me with something so sad and despairing in the brown eyes, that I felt my own grow dim for a moment.

"I wish," she said, suddenly, "oh, Jane, I wish I could tear myself *out of myself!* Can you understand what I mean, what I feel? No, I suppose not. And I can't explain. It is horrible, horrible, horrible! Something I don't want

to be—that I hate to think I am—warring, and fighting, and setting itself against me, upsetting my life and making it all different. I should like to be good, gentle, prosaic, quiet. An amiable woman—that just expresses it—thoroughly content with her life from day to day; desiring nothing and anticipating nothing beyond. But instead of that, what am I?—discontented, passionate, impulsive; a fiend, a fury, a——"

"Oh no, no, Miss Kate," I interrupted, "not that. Don't say such hard things, or make yourself out quite different to what you really are!"

"What I—*really*—am," she said, slowly. "Ah, Jane, that is what no one who knows me—knows. I think there are possibilities within me that I myself am afraid to look into too closely. How shocked you look;" and she laughed a little, but not mirthfully. "Oh, Jane! what a comfort it must be to be good, calm, feminine, prosaic; never to question, never to worry, never—to think."

She turned away then, and went to the door. I stepped forward to open it, and as she left, she turned her head and smiled at me.

"I am going," she said, "to make myself just as ugly as I can!" and with the echo of her

light laughter still in my ears, I returned to my own duties.

I cannot say how that luncheon passed off, or whether Miss Kate kept her resolution. I saw her no more that day, and the next morning she was quite cool, and calm, and indifferent, giving me my orders, but no confidences; and I, of course, asked no questions.

Miss Kate had a little, dignified, stand-off way with her sometimes, that repressed any outward expression on my part of what our relative positions had so long accustomed me to feel concerning her.

I always felt I must keep my place, and wait for her to make the advance, despite the familiarity and friendliness which had so often broken down the hard and fast barriers between mistress and servant.

But a week passed, and another, and yet another, from the date of that luncheon, and still she never mentioned the name that, I am sure, was in both our thoughts so often. I did not like the new, strange, hunted look that at times came into her eyes—a look as of some wild forest creature being gradually driven into a trap from which it saw no escape.

She seemed to live in a whirl of gaiety, and was scarcely ever at home. One morning, when

she looked utterly fagged and worn-out, I ventured on a remonstrance. She only looked at me and smiled that odd, hard, little smile, which of late had taken the place of her childish gaiety and merriment.

"Wear myself out, Jane," she said, repeating my words. "I wish I could. I wish I could be sure it was even possible. I would go on as I am going every day of the year—*every* day—I mean it, Jane—if only I knew it would kill thought, and wear me out, as you call it."

"That sounds foolish, Miss Kate," I said, gravely. "You ought not to be so ungrateful for all the blessings of life."

"I suppose," she said, "it does sound foolish; but it is only—desperate."

A smile crept slowly to her lips and eyes—a little, cruel, mirthless smile, unlike anything I had ever seen on that bright, sweet face.

"I am afraid, Jane," she said, "I did not make myself ugly enough. It was no use. And now things are almost at a crisis."

"Oh, Miss Kate," I cried, terrified by the despair in her face, "don't talk like that—don't tell me there is anything worse——"

She threw herself down into the big arm-chair, and for a moment or two buried her face in her hands as if rent by some inward struggle.

"Oh!" she cried at last. "I must speak—I *must;* I can't keep silence any longer. My heart is breaking, I think. I feel as if I can't bear this strain—I can't! Life is getting too hard for me, Jane. I am not used to playing the hypocrite always; but that is what I have to do —I have to act, act, act, till I am sick of acting, to act to the world—to my husband—to myself —to *him!*"

She caught her breath in a little, sudden sob, but then hurried on, as if the impetuous flow of words were some relief.

"Oh, life is cruel, horrible, hateful," she cried. "I never *wished* to see him. I never wished to win his love. Yes, it has come to that, Jane. He does love me, and I—know it. I can't deceive myself any longer. And, when I thought I was so safe, so happy, so content, fate throws him in my path; and I can't be always cold, always indifferent, because—because——"

"Oh, Miss Kate," I said in horror. "Not because you care—too much?"

"Care?"—she said, and her hands dropped, and she looked at me in straight and simple fashion, as if she were a child again. "No, Jane, I don't—*care*, that does not half express it; only all that makes life for me, all that promises happiness, all that is worth the daily

existence I call—living, is centred in and associated with—Rex Tresyllion. Go where I may he haunts me. Look where I will, I see only his eyes—his face. It seems as if I can't get away from him ; can't, for even one moment, forget him."

"It has come to that ? I questioned, sadly.

"Yes," she said, "he has told me, and I have —listened."

"Does he know," I asked, "that you care too ?"

"I think," she said, "he does. I—I tried my best to hide it. Up to a certain point I succeeded. But there comes a weak moment in every woman's life, and mine came and found me off guard for once. I am afraid "—and she sighed wearily—"I am afraid, Jane, my armour will never serve me again."

"What will you do," I asked her.

"Heaven knows," she said. "In books, of course, people are heroic, and—part ; but I am not heroic, Jane. No more is he. It seems so hard to put all the colour, and sunshine, and light, out of one's life just from an abstract, chilling idea of duty."

"No doubt," I said. "But oh, Miss Kate, if one understands a duty, ought not one to carry it out? The harder a thing is to do,

the more certain we may be that it is right to do it."

"You are quite a philosopher, Jane," she said, drearily; "but if you had ever loved and been tempted as some women are, I think you would have found it rather a hard task to act as you preach. No one, man or woman, can possibly fathom the depth and strength of a temptation that has never touched them individually."

"But is it really—a temptation?" I asked. "Are you sure, Miss Kate, that you are not fancying things—romancing a little—because he is young, and good looking, and celebrated? They are not things to make up one's life, after all. Indeed, I think no woman would marry a good-looking man if she were wise. They are so conceited as a rule, and they never rest satisfied with only one worshipper, and, unfortunately, it is only too easy for them to find a score if they wish."

"I have often thought that," she said, slowly. "I who once imagined that nothing on earth could make me jealous. Yes, Jane, I am afraid it is—temptation. Something—I don't know what—is drawing me slowly, surely to him, in spite of sense, reason, honour, duty—everything that claims my life and warns me to avoid him.

What am I to do? Dear Heaven! what am I to do?"

She wrung her hands in a helpless sort of way, and looked at me with great tears brimming in her eyes.

"I haven't told you all," she said, in a stifled, hurried voice. "If ever you have prayed for me, Jane, pray for me now. John is going away —abroad. He told me so, yesterday. Some relation in the West Indies has died suddenly, and left him a great estate there. But there are legal difficulties and complications, and he must go out and see to them himself. He leaves in a week's time."

"Could you not go with him?" I asked, eagerly.

"I asked him," she said; "but he refused to take me. He said it would be useless, and the climate is bad—the place is not the healthiest in the world. It was all so sudden, so unexpected, that I can scarcely believe it sometimes."

"And what are you to do?" I asked. "Stay on in town alone, or go to Templecombe?"

"Either or both," she said. "He lays no commands on me. I may see the season out, or cut myself adrift from its allurements, just as the whim takes me."

"Does Mr. Tresyllion know?" I asked quickly

The colour left her face. She grew very white.

"No," she said, "not yet. But, doubtless, John will tell him."

"I think, my dear," I said quietly, "you ought to go to Templecombe, and you ought to have your children with you. Don't stay in town after your husband leaves. What is the use of courting danger, of meeting temptation half way?"

"Such a wise old Jane," she said, mockingly. "Such a far-seeing, clear-headed, sensible old person? That is just what I am going to do. My power over myself is not quite gone. I—I can still see what is best and safest for me."

Then, suddenly, her face changed. There was anguish in her eyes, as they turned in swift entreaty to my own. "Oh, Jane! surely it can't last?" she cried. "This pain, this fever, this unrest. Surely, absence and silence will kill it out; surely I shall find rest somewhere—somehow. I don't want to be—happy," she added, piteously; "I only ask to have a little peace once more. To know some content and quiet in my life. Now it is all torture and misery, look at it as I may. I can't sleep at night

—I can't rest by day. My mind is always strained and racked. Often and often I look at myself in wonder. I can't understand why such a thing should have happened to me. All my life has been so free, so careless. I never thought it was in me to take a serious fancy to—to any one. But, perhaps it won't last, Jane. It is just a sort of illness, like measles or scarlet-fever, or something of that sort. It will run its course and be over. What am I saying? Why it *must* be over. There can be no other way. I tell myself that always."

"Yes," I said, sadly. "If it only rested with the telling——"

"You mean," she said, sharply, "that it might—last? That I shall not forget? Oh, Jane! don't you know me better than that? I am not a bit true, or faithful of heart; not a bit; and this—why, it is degrading, shameful, humiliating even to think of. I *must* get over it. There is nothing else to be done. Only it seems a little harder than I once thought it would."

"It will be much harder than you fancy," I said, "if you don't put an end to it at once. The longer you delay—the more you think—the worse it will be."

"You talk," she said, fiercely, "as if one

could help thinking! Do you suppose I want to? Do you suppose it makes me any happier? Heavens—no! But I didn't make myself, or my nature, and I have to put up with it, and bear it."

She dropped her hands, and leant back wearily in the chair. Now that her eyes were free from tears, her face looked even more pathetic in its quiet despair.

"Jane—say 'Heaven help you and save you'" she cried, entreatingly. "I can't pray for myself any longer. There seems to be something between me and the old, simple faith. I have no mother to go to—no friend to whom I could speak as I have spoken to you, and the struggle is wearing me, and making me old, and sad, and haggard. Oh! if I could only sleep and forget for the next six months. You don't know how I dread them, Jane."

She rose and moved restlessly away to the door.

"If I could die—now!" she said, in a low, despairing voice that hardly reached me. "I am afraid of myself. I seem to have lost all strength. I am like a leaf blown here and there by every gust of wind. There is a very strong wind hurrying the leaf along now. I suppose, if I believed in Fate, I would

call it—that. It is as good a name as any other."

The door closed. She was gone.

I sat there, for long—full of sorrow and of pity for the story I had heard; full of dread for its possible sequel.

Was it Fate? I asked myself. Could there be a love at once cruel, compelling, resistless, that made of human lives a sport and a plaything? And I only heard as answer the tones of that sad, young voice echoing in my ears—"I will call it—that. It is as good a name as any other."

CHAPTER XXIII.

PROMISED BLISS.

A WEEK later, Mr. Carruthers left for the West Indies.

It had been a hurried, feverish week—all preparation, and arrangements, and shopping, and rushing about; and Miss Kate had thrown herself feverishly into it, giving herself no rest at all. The boys came from school to bid their father farewell, and they were always with her. I think Mr. Tresyllion kept carefully out of her way that week. No doubt—I thought to myself, bitterly—he had his reasons for doing it. He knew his time would come.

Then, as soon as Mr. Carruthers had gone, Miss Kate started off for Templecombe, and I remained behind in charge of the town house. I felt very sad and low-spirited as I saw my young mistress go. She looked so pale, so worried, so heart-broken, that I knew, only too well, what a terrible battle she must have been fighting with herself. I could only hope that

the children might comfort her, or, at least, occupy her thoughts sufficiently to prevent that morbid dwelling upon one idea, which is, in itself, so often a cause for self-created unhappiness.

Two days after she had left town I answered the door to a visitor in the shape of Mr. Tresyllion. He looked a little conscious as he saw me. The house answered for itself the question on his lips. Shuttered windows and closed rooms spoke of departure only too plainly.

"Has your—has Mrs. Carruthers left town?" he said, eagerly.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

He fumbled about with his card-case; in his nervousness, dropping two or three on the steps.

"Can you tell me," he asked, "if she has gone for any length of time? Won't she finish out the season?"

"I believe not, sir," I answered, stiffly. "Mrs. Carruthers made no mention of coming back to town, at all."

"She is at Templecombe, I suppose?" he continued, as he handed me his card, at last.

Our eyes met. I saw a faint, sudden colour leap into his face. He, too, looked changed, and

ill, and haggard; but I had no pity for him. It seemed to me cowardly and unmanly to persecute a woman in her weakness and misery—a woman unprotected and alone as Miss Kate was now.

"Yes, sir," I said, even more coldly.

"Thank you, Jane," he said, and then turned and walked slowly down the street. I watched him, noting how all the life and spring seemed to have gone out of his step—remembering, too, how different he had looked that first evening I had ever answered the door to him, standing on the steps of Mrs. Cray's house, with his overcoat thrown over his arm. What a queer, up-and-down sort of thing life is!

I went back to my own room wondering what he would do: whether he would go to Templecombe, or write to Miss Kate there? I was sure he intended to do one or the other, by the look in his face.

About a week later, I had a letter from Miss Kate, saying that the housekeeper at Templecombe had been taken very ill, and she wished me to come down there, and was sending up another of the servants, in my place, to Grosvenor Street.

I, therefore, packed up and left town the same day.

I bought some newspapers and periodicals at the bookstall of the railway station, in order to beguile the hours of the long journey, and after the train had fairly started on its way, and I had studied the appearance of my travelling companions, I settled myself comfortably on the seat, and opened one of the papers.

I had read most of its contents, when my eyes rested on a paragraph which had not yet attracted my notice, though I had glanced over it once or twice :

"Terrible collision in the Bay of Biscay. —Loss of the steamship 'Florida'."

I started, and cried out, so that my companions turned round to look at me.

The "Florida" was the steamer in which Mr. Carruthers had sailed. From the account, it appeared that a large American vessel had run into her at night, and she had sunk immediately. Every one of the passengers had perished, asleep in their berths ; one or two of the sailors, alone, had escaped by springing on the deck of the destroying vessel.

It was one of those casualties of which we read, again and again, with a thrill of horror and of pity ; but forget soon enough if we are unconcerned in the catastrophe. I had read, often enough, of shipwrecks and fires at sea, and

collisions, and such like accidents; but when I read the name of the doomed vessel, and knew that it held one human being associated with my own life and experience, the full horror and shock of it seemed to stand out in very different colours.

Did Miss Kate know? What would the news be to her—I asked myself? Sorrow, or regret, or relief?

No need now for penance, and torture, and self-repression. She was free to please herself; to follow her own instincts; to give the rein to all the pent-up feelings of her passionate, impulsive nature.

I read no more. I was in a fever of impatience to reach my journey's end. Never had the hours seemed so long, the miles so many.

It was almost dark when I reached Templecombe. I sprang from the carriage and hurried into the hall. One look at the footman's face told me the news was known.

"My mistress wishes to see you at once," he said.

"How is she?" I asked, eagerly. "How does she bear it?"

"No one has seen her since she heard the sad news," the man answered. "She shut herself

up, alone, in her boudoir, and has been there all day."

I walked upstairs and went straight to the well-remembered room, and knocked at the door.

"It is I, Miss Kate," I said, in answer to the faint, low query that reached me.

The door was flung open. In the dusk of the room I saw the well-known little figure; I caught one glimpse of a white, uplifted face, and eyes swollen and red with passionate weeping. Then—she was in my arms, sobbing like a child.

"Oh, Jane!" she cried. "Oh, dear old Jane. Thank Heaven you have come! Oh, tell me, is it a judgment, do you think? Is Heaven going to punish me for my wickedness? Oh! my poor, good, faithful John——"

Is there any understanding the ways of women?

Time passed on, and Miss Kate grew very grave and quiet. The news was authenticated at the shipping-office, and Mr. Carruthers's lawyer came down to Templecombe, and told her the contents of the will, and arranged all matters of business for her.

She kept the boys at home, and had a tutor

for them, and it seemed to me that she had settled down into quiet content once more. She never mentioned the name of Mr. Tresyllion for three months after she had heard of her husband's death; but, one day, as I was in the boudoir taking some orders about the servants' hall from her, a letter and a card were brought in by the footman, who handed them to her. I saw her face turn rosy red, then she laid the card down, and went over to the window and read the letter.

I knew perfectly well who had written it. I waited quietly until she had finished. Presently she turned to me with a sort of appeal in her look and gesture.

"It is from Mr. Tresyllion," she said, quietly. "He is staying at the village. He wants to know if I will receive him?"

"Yes?" I said, interrogatively.

"Oh, Jane!" she burst out in the old impetuous way, "why should I play the hypocrite? What is the use of pretending to you? Here—read this—say what you think I ought to do. You know the whole story—advise me, now."

I took the letter from her hand. It was not very long, and it began without any ceremony of address:

"I can keep silence no longer. I have respected your grief, and effaced myself, so that you should not think me intrusive; but these three months have seemed an eternity to me. The longing for one sight of your face, one touch of your hand, is becoming intolerable. Surely, you must know what I feel. Surely you cannot have forgotten the words I spoke to you last season? Why should we play the hypocrite to each other any longer? Have we not suffered and struggled enough? *You took all that made life for me, away with yourself last June.* I don't ask for anything, yet, at your hands. Only that I may see you sometimes. Send a line—Yes or No—to the inn here, where I am staying at present.—Always yours,

"REX TRESYLLION."

Her eyes—eager, humid, brilliant—rested on my face as I gave the letter back to her again.

"I think, Miss Kate," I said, "that it is rather—soon; but, after all, we know what is bound to happen, sooner or later. You may as well give him permission to call.

How lovely she looked, as the colour softly flushed her cheeks, and her eyes fell in sudden shyness. I thought, if he had seen her then——

"It seems a long time since June," she said. "I—I cannot help being glad that he has not forgotten."

"Did you think that likely?" I asked.

"Sometimes I have thought it," she answered, slowly, and looking at the letter in her hands, with a soft tenderness in her eyes that was infinitely touching. "I hope it is not wicked to be glad that I may think of him now. I did suffer terribly, Jane, terribly. More than you or any human being can guess, or imagine."

"My dear," I said, "I am not blaming you. We do not have many chance of happiness in this world—it is as well to take them when we can."

"Then I may write and tell him to call?" she said, appealingly—just, for all the world, as if she were a little child again, and I had the charge and control of her actions.

I laughed.

"Of course, Miss Kate," I said. "Only I should not let him stay on here, if I were you. You will have all the country round talking—and it is as well to be discreet. You are both young, after all; and a year's waiting won't harm either of you,"

"No," she said. "I hope, Jane, you don't fancy I am thinking of marrying again in such

indecent haste. Oh, no, no! I shall be perfectly content, now that I know he is true, and really cares, and that there is no wrong in my thinking of him. I don't ask or wish for more. I only wonder how I could ever have been foolish enough to think my life complete without —love."

She wrote her note, and I took it downstairs, and sent one of the servants to the inn with it, and that same evening Mr. Tresyllion came to call; so he did not waste much time.

I never saw anything like the radiance and loveliness of Miss Kate's face that night, when I went to her room in answer to the message brought by her maid.

"I had to send for you, Jane," she said. "I am too happy to keep silent, and I am afraid of betraying myself to the staid, sedate old domestics here. Oh, Jane! have I ever, ever lived before? I don't believe it. I am in love with life—with the whole world. I could sing like the birds at daybreak. There isn't room in my heart for half my joy. It is too much. I am too happy; and yet I wouldn't have a hair's breadth less! How he loves me—how he has always loved me—even when he seemed false. But he never was, Jane! Not really—not in his heart. It has been always,

always me—even from the first hour we met —never any other woman."

"That," I said, ungraciously, "is just what every man tells every woman, when he makes love to her."

"You are a sour, cross old thing," she said, laughing. "But I am too happy to listen to you. Happy! why it was worth all the pain, the doubt, the struggles, the torture of these two years, only to feel that thrill of heart as his hands touched mine; only to see that look in his eyes as they met my own; only to hear his voice tremble for very weight of feeling, as he spoke my name at last, with the right of love, and not—the fear of shame!"

She sank down, suddenly, on her knees and buried her face in the soft coverlet.

"Oh," she sobbed, brokenly, "I hope I am not wicked to love him so—to be glad because he loves me. I was a good wife to John. I did make him happy. He always told me that—always. And I've not forgotten him. I won't be a worse mother to his boys—because—because of this new tie. I think it is the relief that makes me so glad. The lifting of that awful, awful weight. And I am not going to marry in any haste, Jane. Not for two years, at least—if he will only let me

wait—for, now I know he loves me and is true, nothing else seems to matter. I should be perfectly content, even if we were parted. I am so sure of him—so sure of myself."

And I thought, as I saw her kneeling there, with face upraised, and tear-dimmed eyes, and clasped hands pressed against her throbbing heart, that I never should see again on any human face the pure, and passionate, and utterly ecstatic happiness that shone through hers on that night.

But a chill presentiment of evil crept into my heart as I looked down at that lovely, radiant face. It seemed to say that she was too happy; that life had given her too much. Alas! alas! how soon, how fatally soon, I was to find that presentiment verified!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LOVE FOUND—GAINED . . ."

MR. TRESYLLION stayed a week at the inn, and then went back to town.

He was quite right, I thought. It was early days for the young widow to be receiving gentlemen visitors. And I knew what a country place was like, and how every one knew every one else's business better than their own, and the smallest action became food for gossip. Miss Kate was not likely to escape. She was too pretty, too independent, too thoroughly indifferent to general opinion, and had never therefore been quite popular. The county magnates did not like the supreme contempt she showed for their opinions and prejudices, and the manner in which she rode, drove, walked, and visited just how and where she pleased. Then she was so young, such a girl in every way, and as likely as not to be romping

with her boys in the garden when a carriage rolled up the avenue, instead of sitting in state in the drawing-room to receive visitors.

So I was glad Mr. Tresyllion was not bent on staying there, to give occasion for more talk than usually abounded.

It is an odd thing that we spend so much of our lives in trying to avoid giving occasion for scandal—wondering what other people think and say of us, and yet neither the better nor the worse for their opinions, if we knew the real truth.

Miss Kate heard from her lover every day, and, I believe, answered him as frequently. She was not so restless or impetuous as she used to be. A sweet, contented happiness enfolded her, and there was no bitter mixed with the sweet now. Her nature seemed to unfold daily, and grow richer, fuller, deeper, more loveable in its absolute content with life.

To see her face when a letter from him arrived, was a study. The shy, sweet droop of eyelids over the betraying eyes; the soft blush; the happy smile. And all day she would flit from place to place like a sunbeam, a snatch of some tender love-song falling from her lips, or a sigh of deep and pure content stirring the close and dusky folds of her mourning-gown.

"He writes the most perfect letters, Jane," she would say to me.

"No doubt," I would answer. "If a poet who is a lover can't write good love-letters, I wonder who in the world can!"

Well, no need to dwell on this part of my story. Three months more passed, and the quiet content began to give place to a certain restlessness—and I was not at all surprised—when one day she asked me if I would go up to town with her. She had business to attend to, and some necessary shopping, so she said, with a little conscious blush.

Of course I agreed, and we went off one morning, and in due time arrived at Grosvenor Street, where two rooms had been prepared for her according to orders. Part of the house was still shut up; and she refused to have it opened, as she did not wish any of her fashionable friends to know she was in town.

She had left her maid behind her at Templecombe. There was only an old servant to cook and see to the house—and myself.

"I shan't stay more than three or four days," she said, the first evening we arrived, as I brought her some tea into the little library downstairs, where she had elected to sit and have her meals.

Just then the front-door bell rang; and I answered it, smiling to myself at the transparency of lovers' excuses.

Of course, it was Mr. Tresyllion. I showed him into the library, and went downstairs to the kitchen for another cup and saucer. Perhaps I sighed a little enviously, thinking of the rapture that meeting upstairs held. I gave them five minutes before returning with the cup. How happy they looked! and what a handsome pair they made! She so small and dainty, with her flushed cheeks, and big, soft eyes that fairly danced with happiness, and the dusky crown of her hair, catching all lights and shades from fire and lamp; and he handsomer than ever, I thought, with that proud and radiant look upon his face, and such a world of tender love in his eyes that the blindest person might have read his secret—aye, and envied it.

He remained all the evening; and looking at Miss Kate afterwards, I began to wonder how elastic a space of time the proposed four days would represent. It is never easy to cut short delight with one's own hand.

Of course she stayed on, and week followed week, and still they could not tear themselves apart. Their love was the most absolute and

perfect intoxication; and every day only seemed to ripen and intensify it.

There was the most complete and perfect sympathy between them—that entire magnetism of soul, sense, and nature which is so rare; but which, wherever it does exist, exceeds all other feelings. Never one hour of weariness, never a shadow on either face, never anything but the tenderest comprehension, the most perfect companionship, the sweetness of welcome, the regret of parting.

I had read of such love in books. I had never imagined it could exist. But there was no doubt it did in this case. Not that Miss Kate was always the same, or less a "Lady of Moods" than her lover had called her in the old days that had seemed so hopeless and despairing.

Her variability was still her great charm; but it was sobered now by the depth and force of a feeling to which her nature had hitherto been a stranger.

"He actually seems to think I don't love him, Jane," she said to me one night as she sat before the mirror with her loosened hair about her, and her eyes looking back at her own reflection. "Not *love* him; fancy that! Ah! it is only because I love him too much; because I am afraid to let him see into the full depths of my

heart, that I can deceive him so. Love him—as if that half expresses what he is to me! There seems to me no word that can say it; no song that could thrill with it; nothing in music, or speech, that can in any way convey the feelings of my heart now!"

She bent her head on her hands, and the veiling hair fell round her like a cloud. A little sob broke from her, startling and saddening to hear, as the outcome of those passionate words.

"It is too much," she cried, wildly. "I can't bear it—sometimes. It seems wicked, mad, idolatrous to care so intensely for one faulty human being. For I don't deceive myself, Jane. He is very far from perfect; but then, who am I to cavil at faults? Heaven knows I have my share, and more than my share; but when I think of him, when I look at him, when I hear his voice, when his arms hold me, it is just as if my heart's ecstacy would kill me, from sheer excess of joy, and pain, and delight, and fear, all mingled and all one!"

"In that case," I said, in my most matter-of-fact manner, "I can only give you one piece of advice; get married as soon as ever your year of mourning has expired, and go abroad and live there for a while. Believe me, Miss Kate, there's nothing like a good sober dose of matrimony for

curing romance, and you are making a hero and an idol out of a mere man after all. Handsome, I grant you—and clever, too—but only a man, Miss Kate; and a man is always capable of inflicting the greatest amount of suffering upon the woman who loves him as you love Mr. Tresyllion."

"Yes," she said, slowly, "I often think I love him too much. It is unwise; almost, I fear, unwomanly—but you remember, Jane, what I once told you about 'letting myself go.' I fear I have done that at last. It seems as if I asked and desired nothing more of life now. But I am afraid; afraid of him, of myself, of my own happiness, of even the shadow of this coming separation. And he—he is always trying now to persuade——"

She stopped abruptly. Her face grew scarlet as she lifted it, and shook back the dark cloud of her hair.

"Oh, I never meant to say it," she panted. "Jane, why do you lead me on to speak of him?"

"Shall I finish the sentence, Miss Kate?" I asked. "It doesn't need any great cleverness—to marry him, and at once, I suppose. Well—why not?"

"Oh, Jane—I couldn't, I couldn't. It would

seem so wrong, so forgetful, so—so hateful of me to do such a thing."

"You have both begun to think of it," I said, dryly. "That is the first step. It is surprising how soon all the arguments will be 'for' instead of 'against.'"

"Oh no," she said, with sudden resolution. "They must be always 'against.' I am going away because I'm afraid of listening—afraid of his entreaties and persuasions."

"You might marry him privately," I said.

"Are you a witch?" she cried angrily. "Do you guess—do you know what he has been saying—every day of this last week?"

"I know you are both madly in love. It doesn't need much witchcraft to see that," I answered, "and I know what men are, as a rule. Mr. Tresyllion is young, passionate, adoring. He naturally finds every week a month, and every month a year, especially if you continue to keep him in a state of uncertainty about your own feelings."

"He will know them," she said, "some day—some day, when there will be no need of disguise or pretence. After all, Jane, he deserves a little punishment for his bad treatment of me in the past. I am still jealous of that woman."

"Oh, my dear," I said, "no man is perfect, and very, very few are faithful. Believe that, and you will save yourself a deal of misery."

"Cruel, hard old Jane," she said, lifting her sweet eyes to my face. "But you can't make me doubt him now. I am too sure, and too happy. Oh, Jane, Jane," and she blushed suddenly over face and neck, "what a tale his eyes tell; just as he said to-night:

> "'What's the earth,
> With all its art, verse, music, worth,
> Compared with love—found, gained, and kept.'"

"Poetry," I said, "is all very fine; but real life says different. The love may be found, and gained; but I doubt its being 'kept' for very long. One or other wearies—cools—forgets. Ah! my dear, I've seen so much of it—so much of it."

"Yes," she said wistfully, "I can believe you have, Jane. But our love is going to be an exception. It has endured a pretty harsh ordeal. It has stood a severe test. For myself I know I am sure. There is not the faintest doubt plucking at my heart. I love him, Jane—heart, soul, sense, spirit. He is all and everything to me—my very, very life. To lose him now would be worse than death; a million times worse!"

"How can you love him so, and yet leave him in doubt as to your feelings?" I asked wonderingly.

"I wonder myself," she said. "But perhaps the very depth and strength of my love prevents my showing it. I am so still, so quiet, that he thinks me cold. Well," and she rose and shook back her hair, laughing the low, happy laughter of content, "well, Jane, he will know all in good time. Ah, it will be a 'good time,' as I used to say when I was a child. No memory to poison our kisses; no doubt to chill: no foreboding to part us any more. I often wonder if Heaven will let us be so happy. For you know, Jane, all the famous love histories of the world are unhappy, and have tragic endings."

But I laughed and cheered her, and smiles soon replaced the tears that were threatening to fall.

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHEN THE SEA GIVES UP ITS DEAD."

I SUPPOSE Miss Kate was firmer than I imagined possible, or else enjoyed her woman's prerogative of saying "No," too much to give in, for she remained firm on the subject of that probationary year, and, to my surprise, told me on the day succeeding our conversation, that she was going to return to Templecombe at the end of the week—Friday or Saturday.

It eventually became Saturday; and on the Friday, about dusk, she and Mr. Tresyllion came in from a shopping expedition, laden with toys and parcels for the boys, and told me to bring them some tea in the library.

I thought they both looked a little more grave and sad than was their wont, but put it down to the fact of the coming parting; for Mr. Tresyllion was going to Italy when Miss Kate left town.

I brought in the tea, lingering a little in the

pretty, firelit room, with its multitude of flowers, and ferns, and lounges, and knicknacks, and soft, low chairs, and all the feminine surroundings by which Miss Kate had transferred it into what was essentially a "woman's room." Miss Kate had thrown her bonnet and cloak down on a chair. Her pretty hair was all loose and soft about her face. I remember so well seeing Mr. Tresyllion go up to her, and laughingly arrange its picturesque disorder, and then, framing her upturned face in both his hands, bend down and softly kiss the pouting lips.

I closed the door and left them, and was just going down the stairs when a loud peal at the bell startled me.

I went to the front door, expecting to find, as usual, some of the constantly arriving parcels that marked Miss Kate's expeditions. It was quite dusk, but the light from the gas-lamp showed me a tall figure standing there—a man's figure. I could not see the face. A wide, slouched hat hid it from my sight; but a voice, a familiar voice greeted me by name, and with a sudden shock of fear and horror, I staggered back against the door-post as the visitor lifted his hat and showed me the face of my master—Mr. John Carruthers.

For a moment or two I really didn't know what I said, or did. Everything seemed to be whirling round me, and the buzzing in my ears rendered his words quite unintelligible.

"Is your mistress at Templecombe, or here?" he kept repeating; and at last I stammered out that she was here, but that we were to have left on the morrow.

He strode through the hall; but I rushed after him and kept him back a moment or two while I poured out a flood of incoherent explanations.

"Oh, sir, pray let me prepare my mistress," I implored. "You know, we all thought you were—were shipwrecked, and all these months no word—and—and, oh, sir, think of the shock—so sudden, so unexpected, so——"

"You don't say so—joyful," he said, looking sternly at me; and no doubt I did seem rather flurried and flustered. "Don't trouble your head, Jane. Joy never kills; and I can break the news of my own escape from death better than anyone else. Where is your mistress?"

"In the library, sir," I said, hopelessly. I could only trust he would not find her in Mr. Tresyllion's arms, or sitting at his feet on a stool by the fire as she so often did.

He reached the door, and I followed, trem-

bling. But even as his hand was on the handle, he turned round and made a sign to me.

"Go in first," he said. "Say someone—a friend—with news of her husband wishes to see her."

He drew aside, and I knocked and opened the door. Miss Kate was sitting at the little tea-table. Mr. Tresyllion was standing by the fireplace, tea-cup in hand, his back to the leaping flames, his face with its usual look of bright and gay content turned enquiringly to me.

"Why, Jane, what's the matter?" he said. "Have you seen a ghost? You look quite scared!"

I closed the door sharply, wondering whether his voice had reached the watcher outside.

"Oh, Miss Kate," I cried in a stifled way. "Oh, my dear—my dear. Can you be strong—be brave—just for a little while? You must act, you *must*. There's no help. For your own sake; for your children's sake. Oh, Miss Kate don't look like that. How am I to tell you?"

The white, stony face was pitiful and awful in its tragic misery. She guessed—she knew. I suppose my terror told her that only one

thing could have happened. As for Mr. Tresyllion, I heard the crash of a falling cup, and he was beside her, facing me. I thought that, to my dying day, I should never forget the look that leaped into his eyes.

"For Heaven's sake, woman!" he cried, "speak out. What has happened? Not—not news of——"

The word died off his white lips. He could not speak it."

"Yes," I said, breathlessly, "news of Mr. Carruthers. He is not—not dead."

There was not a word—not a sound. Only, as if by one impulse they turned and looked at each other—such a look. His arms dropped; every muscle in the strong young frame seemed to relax. He was like a dead man standing there, and, for a moment, I felt more fear for him than for her.

Then came a low, faint cry. She moved blindly, helplessly to me, like a hurt child.

"Who is it?" she said, in a hoarse whisper. "Who—told you?"

"Oh, my dear!" I cried, and caught her in my arms as she swayed suddenly forward. "I must say it—I must tell you! Oh, Miss Kate! be strong—be brave. After to-day it doesn't matter if—if you do break down; but

not now—not to-night. Your—your husband is here."

"*Here!*"

I felt the shudder that ran through the slight young frame. She drew back and looked at me.

"Here? Do you mean to say in this house—near me—now?"

"Yes," I said, "and you must try and seem glad—or—or content. You must! Oh, Miss Kate, remember he knows nothing—nothing; and it is only six months——"

"Six months," she said, "only six months. Do you hear, Rex? I said it was too soon to be glad—that you were—too—impatient."

Then her voice broke; all the life and light went out of her eyes as the flame of a lamp extinguished. Like a stone she fell to the floor at my feet—just as, with a sudden, impatient wrench, the door was flung open by John Carruthers.

I have but an indistinct memory of what happened then. I think Mr. Tresyllion stood aside, his face white, and set in stern resolve, his eyes resting on the little figure that we had lifted to the couch—the figure over which another man bent in imploring anguish, blind

and deaf to all else, save that Fate had restored her to his arms.

If it was terrible to me—only a looker-on at the tragedy—what must it have been for the two concerned in it?

"Heaven help them! Heaven pity them!" I prayed over and over again, as I bent over my poor, unconscious, young mistress, and tried to second her husband's endeavours to restore her senses.

Not that I thought it anything but cruel kindness to do so, knowing full well to what misery she must awaken.

Ah, how sorry I felt for them all! What a wretched, hopeless business it all looked!

And yet, paramount in my mind, and more important than even their happiness, seemed the desirability of concealing the real facts of the case from Mr. Carruthers. He had not as yet seemed to notice Mr. Tresyllion's presence; he was too much concerned about his wife. But after a while she gave signs of returning consciousness, and I glanced in alarm at the quiet figure, with its face set in such stern and hopeless misery.

If he would have only left the room, or moved, or made any sign! But no; he just stood there as if turned to stone, and indifferent

to anything that might happen. At last Miss Kate opened her eyes and sat up. She heard her husband's rapturous words; she saw him kneeling there by her side, great tears rolling down his cheeks; his voice speaking out her name in broken, breathless accents. He told her of his marvellous escape, of perils, dangers, difficulties; and she listened, white and trembling, and with her great eyes, strained and terrified, fixed upon his face.

And then, quite suddenly, Mr. Tresyllion seemed to recover himself, and, as Mr. Carruthers rose to his feet at last, he came forward with extended hand, and in a strange, hoarse voice, spoke out congratulations on his return.

Mr. Carruthers did not seem to think it strange that he should be there, or to notice anything amiss with him. Perhaps he was too excited and upset himself. For my part, I can only say I was thankful when I saw Mr. Tresyllion take up his hat, and, with some incoherent speech about not intruding any longer, leave the room, giving neither look nor hand-clasp to Miss Kate. I followed him out; but when he got to the hall door, he stood for a moment leaning against it as if strength had failed him.

"Oh, God of Heaven!" he panted, suddenly. His hand passed to his heart as if to still its

pain. "How can I bear it; how can I lose her —now?"

I summoned up courage then, and approached.

"Sir," I said, "Mr. Tresyllion, oh, don't give way. Think of her. It is ten thousand times worse for her than for you."

"I suppose it is, Jane," he muttered, hoarsely. "Oh, what have we done to deserve this devil's trick of Fate?"

I stood there quite silent, not knowing what to say or do. Presently his hands dropped, and he turned his face to me. So white and haggard was its misery, that I could scarcely keep back the tears as I looked at him.

"I can't think—I can't reason yet," he said. "But I must see her again. I can't leave her like this. You must help me, Jane."

The livid, deathly hue of his face, the more than mortal anguish in his eyes, held me dumb and powerless. I had looked on sin, and sorrow, and suffering in my time; but I had never seen, and I pray I never may see again, any human creature look as Mr. Tresyllion looked that night.

"Oh, sir," I entreated, feebly, "don't try and see her any more. Write, if you wish; but don't, for both your sakes, have any more

meetings. You are parted; nothing can help or alter that. Why make it harder?"

He looked at me in a bewildered way, as if he had not heard or understood what I had said.

"Poor little Kate," he muttered, hoarsely. "She was quite right. I was in too great haste to be happy. Would to Heaven I might die to-night!"

His hands groped feebly for the latch, and I —my eyes blind with tears—pushed it back and opened the door, and saw him stagger out into the cold, night air.

Then I closed the door and went back into the dim hall and sat down there, trying to think clearly and calmly over all that had taken place.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"GOOD-BYE——"

NOT long after Mr. Tresyllion had left, I was summoned again to the library.

"Your mistress is very feverish and hysterical," explained Mr. Carruthers. "I think you had better get her to bed. I'm afraid the shock was too sudden. It appears that my letter, explaining everything, has not been forwarded from Templecombe."

I saw he suspected nothing, and wondered how long he would remain in that "ignorance" which certainly was "bliss" in his case. Miss Kate followed me out of the room on her husband's arm, walking as a sleep-walker might, and apparently too dazed and stupefied as yet for actual suffering.

But it came soon enough, as I knew it would and must, and I had to sit there by her side through the long hours of that night, listening to her low, plaintive moans; or watching those miserable, haunting eyes staring blankly at the

wall or the firelight, and unconscious now of my presence, or her own peril.

A time so terrible followed, that even now I dread to look back upon it. A time when mad images of fever took the place of all sense and memory; when day followed day, and night succeeded night; and still it seemed there was no change or improvement.

And every night, as darkness fell, and the lights were lit in the straw-covered street, a solitary figure would pace to and fro on the opposite pavement—waiting, waiting with more than mortal patience, till I could slip down and give the news, which, alas! was no news. And sometimes at midnight, or in the quiet morning hours, I could hear that step still echoing on the deserted pavement. And sometimes, too, it seemed to me that she heard it, and recognised it, or felt the strange magnetism of that fateful presence, for she would start up in the bed, her eyes wide and strained, as if seeking to see something invisible; the babbling, feverish words stilled and silenced in the eagerness of listening. Then she would sink back once more on the pillows, going over and over again the same weary, senseless round of words—but never by one of them betraying the secret that was locked in her passionate heart.

Mr. Carruthers was as miserable and anxious as man could be, and about as helpless in a sick-room as men usually are. We had the best doctors, the best nurses—everything that money could procure, or affection suggest. But with it all the dreadful battle had to be waged between youth and strength, and death; and nothing could hasten or shorten the combat.

It was indeed, as I said before, a terrible time. But at last youth and strength got the best of it, and she was pronounced out of danger.

That night—the first time for many a long day—I put on my bonnet and shawl and went out, and met Mr. Tresyllion, and we walked round and round the square beyond, I trying to cheer him as best I could, and persuade him to leave England, and go away for a time, until the first smart and pain of this terrible blow was over.

I might as well have spoken to the iron railings by which we stood.

"I will see her again. I *must*—if I die for it," he said, doggedly and determinedly. And I sighed as I looked at the changed young face, haggard now, and with terrible lines and shadows blotting out the light and life of its beautiful youth. "How can I leave her like this?" he went on, as I still persisted in my

weak entreaties. "A month ago, my promised wife; and now, not a word—a look—a hand-clasp to bridge this gulf of division. Do you fancy I could have lived through all these days and nights if it hadn't been just for that hope—the hope I might see her again—look once more into the dear, brown eyes, hear the sweet, remembered voice saying my name? That's all I want, Jane; all I ask. But I would sooner forfeit life than the hope of it. Life!" and he laughed contemptuously. "What is it to me now? All that made it—all that beautified it—all that gave me a thought of happiness, or a throb of joy, has had its death-blow!"

"You don't think of her?" I said.

"Don't I?" he cried, passionately. "How little you know! I can tell by my own pain what hers must be. If I went away when she was weak, suffering, desolate, what would she think?"

"Better that she should think ill of you," I said, "than suffer as she will suffer now."

"She need not suffer," he said, abruptly, then stopped, and looked at my startled face with a sudden, shamed confusion. "I—I mean——" he stammered.

"Hush," I said, "I know what you mean; but if you have any regard for her—for the future

—for—for her real happiness, you will not tempt her now."

"Heaven forbid," he said, "that I should do —that. But I think, often, that my pain is beyond human endurance."

The misery and hopelessness in his voice brought the tears to my eyes. To think of that beautiful dream laid waste—to think that the old, weary struggle must begin all over again!

"If I could kill my memory—or myself," he muttered, desperately. "Now go, Jane—go back to your post; but remember, not all the power of men, or devils, shall keep me from her side when she is well enough to see me. Of that I am determined. It may be the last time on earth. I could almost pray that it might. I suppose it will come to putting the seas between us sooner or later! Doesn't it seem a strange thing that the whole of one's life can be wrecked just for the love of one woman—such a little woman, too!" and he laughed bitterly—recklessly.

How strange it sounded in the quiet street! Yet I thought no sob had ever held such pathos, or spoken such despair. Then he drew his hat sharply over his eyes, and left me without another word.

I went back to the house and to my duties

there; but my heart was heavy with dread, and not even the new consciousness in my dear's pretty eyes, nor the weak, loving smile she gave me, were of any effect to raise my spirits. I could only think of the misery and the trouble that threatened her, and wonder, in a bewildered, hopeless fashion, what the end of it all would be.

Miss Kate, happily for her, was as yet too feeble to think or feel. She just seemed content to lie still, and be ministered to and waited on, asking nothing, saying nothing. But a week glided by, and she was able to lie on the couch in her dressing-room; and a faint, fitful colour began to replace the waxen paleness in her cheeks. I noted that her eyes were often absorbed and thoughtful, and they had a way of following me about and questioning me, that was excessively embarrassing.

At last the evil day came. We were alone, and she was better and stronger than she had yet seemed; strong enough to talk — so the doctor said—and she seemed impatient to put that newly-received permission to the test. I could not evade her any longer. She dismissed the nurse, and bade her take a long spell of rest; and then whispered me to lock the door and come and sit close beside her.

"Tell me all—everything," she said, beseechingly. "Where is he? Does he know I have been ill? Hasn't he written to me?"

I couldn't resist the pleading in her eyes. I told her how he had been like a sentinel at his post, for all these weary weeks; how I had been obliged, even against my better judgment, to slip out from time to time and give him news of her. She listened quite quietly—far too quietly, I thought, for her. It was as if she, too, were framing some desperate resolve, but she gave me no clue to her thoughts that night, nor for many days that followed, each of which brought improved health and strength, though she seemed less than thankful for such gifts. Mr. Carruthers left for Templecombe as soon as she was really on a fair way to recovery, and it was arranged that she should go there also, as soon as the doctor thought her strong enough to bear the journey.

The nurses had left. She was able now to come downstairs to the library, if she wished; but for long she shrank from going into that room, and I knew only too well the reason.

At last, one evening she told me she was coming down. On the morrow Mr. Carruthers was expected, and, in all probability, we should leave town at the end of the week.

I go back now to my diary for the events of this night — a night destined to live in my memory as long as my life lasts.

It was about eight o'clock, as near as I can remember, when Miss Kate left her dressing-room. She looked very white and fragile, I thought, as I followed her down the staircase; and her loose gown of white cashmere, bordered with white fur, seemed to increase the delicacy and youth of her appearance.

A bright fire burned in the grate. The couch was drawn up near it, and she nestled down amidst the soft bearskin rugs with a sigh of fatigue. I noticed that she was trembling greatly.

I lit the lamps and drew down the blinds.

"Would you like me to stay with you, Miss Kate?" I asked her.

She looked up quickly.

"Yes, Jane," she said. "It is rather— lonely."

Her eyes wandered from place to place. How full of memories that room must have been to her! What an embodiment of "the eloquence of silent things"!

I drew a chair up beside the couch, and watched her in silence, and not without fear.

Presently she raised herself on one arm, and,

looking straight at me, said quickly, "Jane, I have been all this time making a resolution. It was very hard to do—but I have done it at last. I am going to tell John everything."

I looked at her in amazement. "Oh, Miss Kate," I cried, "is that wise? You will spoil all his peace of mind for ever."

"Better that," she cried, passionately, "than deceit and hypocrisy. I will tell him the whole pitiful, miserable story. After all, he is my husband; he is bound to help me; to protect me from—myself. For it has come to that. I daren't trust myself, Jane. I am too weak where Rex is concerned. I only know I love him—and I could just as easily tear the heart from my breast as change my feelings. Oh," and she sobbed helplessly, weakly, as one in mortal terror. "Oh, Jane, Jane, if only I had died—if only I had died! Why has Heaven raised me up again to go through all this awful suffering? I thought it was over. Surely once in a lifetime is sufficient."

"My dear," I said, pityingly, "we can't tell the why and wherefore of our sufferings here. How often and often men have puzzled about it!"

"Puzzled!" she cried, bitterly, "I have thought and thought till sometimes I fancied I should go mad. It seems as if we spend our

youth in desiring experience, and all our after years in regretting it. And one is so—alone—after all. No friendship, no love really reaches deep enough to help us. I was so content with life once; but now—it is all fever, unrest, torture. And yet it does not seem as if I had wilfully done wrong. What tears I have shed, Jane! Sometimes it has seemed as if my very heart's blood was being wrung out from my burning eyes; And it was all for nothing—all for nothing."

"Oh no, Miss Kate," I answered. "Heaven sends sorrow for our good. It is but part of life's lesson, and we must learn it soon or late."

"I used to think," she said, wearily, "that only physical sensations were real enough to hurt one. How little I knew! Oh, Jane, Jane, I would rather have the worst bodily pain, than this awful struggling with my heart and its weakness. It is a fight where I am always worsted; and my strength goes, and goes, and goes. I—I—it is no use trying now to puzzle out why we met, or why we loved; nothing can alter the fact that we have done both. And because we ought not to have loved—because from the first it seemed wrong, and—and impossible—it only struck its roots deeper, it only spread its arms wider, wider, till the

embrace enclosed all life that was worth calling life."

I turned aside to hide the tears that had gathered in my eyes. There was a long silence in the quiet room. Then she lifted her face and wrung her hands together as if in a sudden paroxysm of pain.

"You know, Jane," she went on, suddenly, "I have been quite quiet, quite patient all this time; but I have thought everything out, and have come to this conclusion. I cannot fight my battle any longer. I haven't the strength. I will tell John so, and he must help me. Surely he cannot blame me so very much. I was so young. I—I had not taken life in any way seriously when I married; and no one could have tried harder than I tried to conquer the feeling I had for Rex Tresyllion. But it was all no use—no use. And now I have made up my mind. To-morrow John will be here; to-morrow I will tell him everything. He can decide what he pleases. Perhaps he will think me wicked, ungrateful, false, shallow. I cannot help it. I would sooner be thought the wickedest woman in the world, than know myself to be a hypocrite in his house."

"You will lose both men," I said. "The man you love, who can be nothing to you now; and

the man who loves you, and whom you are going to put to a test from which even an angel might shrink. Oh, surely, surely you will not do it!"

"I mean to do it," she repeated, resolutely, her pale lips set in something of the stern and cruel lines I had seen so often in Sir Rupert's face. "I can go to papa," she went on presently, "and live abroad with him; and, perhaps, John will let me see the boys—sometimes. They love me, and won't think harshly of me, I know."

I was silent. I could not think of anything to say, being, indeed, too startled and too alarmed at the desperate resolution she had formed.

She had been so quiet all this time—and to think that in her heart she had been planning anything so mad, and useless, and almost—cruel!

She sank back again on the pillows and closed her eyes, as if for very weariness. For a few moments the stillness was unbroken, save for the ticking of the clock, or the fall of the ashes in the grate.

Suddenly she sprang up; her eyes dilated; two bright spots of vivid crimson burning in either cheek; her small hands, so white and wasted now, clasped tight to her heart. "Oh,

Jane," she cried, "listen; that is his step outside—there—on the pavement!"

"Nonsense, Miss Kate," I said, impatiently. "There are so many people passing to and fro. How can you tell one step from another?"

I *feel* it," she said, quietly. "I know he is there just as surely as I know I live, Jane. I should know it, I believe, if I were lying in my grave, and he bent over the poor dust that once meant—me. Oh, my love—my love!" . . . .

I could hear the step; slow, measured, steadily passing to and fro beneath the lighted window. I looked at her as she sat there, her breath coming and going unevenly, the colour paling in her cheeks; her hands still clasped against her throbbing breast.

"I will see him," she said, suddenly. "Go and tell him so, Jane. It will be for the last time, but I must say good-bye—better that pain than the blank, desolate silence of such weeks as these."

I rose from my seat.

"Remember, Miss Kate," I said, warningly, "you are still very weak, and unfit for any agitation. You are doing a very unwise thing, in my opinion."

"Do you think," she said, smiling bitterly,

"that life is so dear and precious that I am afraid to risk it? But you may stay here if you like. Perhaps it would be as well. You can tell John, to-morrow, that, as his wife, I remembered what was due to him."

I went out then and opened the front door. Her instinct had not deceived her. Mr. Tresyllion was there. He came up when he saw me, and looked enquiringly into my face.

"Will you come in, sir?" I said, abruptly. "Mrs. Carruthers wishes to see you."

The blood flushed warm and bright to the haggard young face. He looked almost incredulous. "Is it true; do you mean it?" he exclaimed, brokenly.

"Yes, sir. That is my message. Mrs. Carruthers is downstairs for the first time. To-morrow she leaves for Templecombe."

He came in at once; but, as I closed the door, I saw him stagger, and lean against the balustrade of the stairs. I thought how terribly ill he looked; but I made no remark, only led the way to the library door, and held it open for him to pass through.

"She—she is alone?" he said, in a hoarse, strange whisper. And, knowing the dread in his mind, I hastened to reassure him, adding that Mr. Carruthers was at Templecombe.

Miss Kate was half-lying, half-sitting on the couch; her face white as her gown, and her eyes looking larger and darker than ever in contrast to that waxen pallor.

He seemed to make but one stride, and then —he was bending over her—her hands clasped tight in his, his eyes devouring every line and feature of the sweet, changed face.

"Oh, Kate, Kate!" he cried, and then was silent, save for the laboured breath that seemed to tear at his heart.

She looked up into his eyes, and then—in a passion of sobs and tears, she buried her face in the hands she had wrenched from his grasp. She had overrated her strength, or the shock and surprise of that change in him had been too much for her self-control.

He turned abruptly to me.

"Give her something, for Heaven's sake!" he cried. "I—I can't bear to see her cry."

He moved away to the fireplace, and I saw him lean his head on his folded arms, and stand there in resolute endeavour to retain the self-control so sorely tried.

I gave Miss Kate some sal-volatile, and did my best to urge her to compose herself. For a brief space there was silence; then he turned again, and, seeing she was leaning quietly back

on her pillows, he drew near and seated himself by her side.

I drew back into the darkest corner of the room. Neither of them seemed to notice if I were there, or not.

"You are so weak—still," he said. "Perhaps I ought not to have come in. But how could I help it? I have only lived for this moment ever since I knew you were out of danger. Oh, my poor little darling——"

"Hush!" she said, sharply. "Don't call me *that*. I can't be yours again—ever—ever again. I sent for you to tell you—that. I prayed so hard to die, and yet I have had to live—— Oh, Rex, don't look like that—you kill me!"

Their eyes met in one long glance, fraught with sharp pain, and tearless misery. So might Eve and Adam have looked their last at Paradise; so might lost souls look back on the glorious "might-have-beens" of a wasted life.

"Kate," he said, at last, "have you made up your mind—have you thought of what is to become of us now?"

"Yes," she said; "it is only too clear—too plain; you—you must know that yourself, Rex. Our dream is over—nothing remains but to part—to forget, or, if that is not possible, to

bear the pain till death or absence kills it out of our hearts."

"I think," he said, in a harsh, strange voice, "that your decision is in itself a death-blow to —one of us. How can I forget—how can I live, without you? You have become all and everything to me. You have uprooted every previous object, aim, content, that made up life. As well ask me to cease to breathe, as to forget. I simply *cannot* do it; there is no use in making false promises. I know, as well as you do, that I have no claim upon you now, but that doesn't make me love you one whit the less; nor could it, if fifty John Carruthers stood in my path."

"Don't you think," she said, with a little mirthless smile, "one—is enough? He can part us as effectually as fifty!"

"Oh, Kate," he cried, "don't jest, don't trifle. Remember this is life or death to me. Heaven knows I did not want to love you. I tried my best to put you out of my thoughts, my heart, my life. But it was no use. Did ever Fate play so cruel a trick before?"

"There is no use in railing at Fate now," she said, wearily. "We have to make up our minds to go through an ordeal such as we never dreamt of facing. There is no escape—none."

Once more he looked at her; I saw the warm, bright colour flush her cheeks, and her eyes sink in sudden, shamed confusion.

"No, Rex," she said; "no—no—no! I have thought of that. I knew you would think of it; but I cannot do it. I should never be happy—never for one single moment; though Heaven knows I love you more than any human creature on the face of this earth. But you could not stifle remorse; you could not give me content or peace. I should try you in a thousand ways, and you would grow weary and unhappy too. It would need more than mortal patience to bear with me, and the deepest of deep human love to satisfy me."

"And I would give you both," he cried, with sudden, mastering passion. "Yes, and more than both. Every throb of heart and soul, every dream, every desire! You might drain my life of all it holds, and I would be content to give it you. You might exact every sentiment that love can give, or passion satisfy, tax patience to its utmost, constancy to the depth and height of its every meaning, and still I would be content to worship you, and ask no reward save—your love. Your love that was—that *is* mine, Kate; deny it if you can!"

He was kneeling beside her, clasping her

hands in both his own; his face ablaze with passionate emotion; his eyes gazing through tears at her paling face.

"I can't—deny—it," she said; and her voice grew strangely low and solemn. "To my own eternal misery—I love you."

"Oh, hush," he cried despairingly. "Don't speak like that. Reproach from you is more than I can bear."

He rose and stood beside her, one hand resting on the scroll of the couch where she lay.

"You will go back," he said, "to your old life, to your husband's arms, to your children's love; but I——"

There were no words to fill that broken pause. It was eloquent enough of the desolation that the future must hold.

"Never to see you; never to touch your hand, your lips. Oh, I can't bear it; I can't face it. I, who looked upon you as my wife, my very own. Oh, love, you are killing me."

A sob burst from him; the terrible, choking sob wrung from a man's anguish.

She rose and stood before him, pale and trembling.

"Don't," she said, in a low, stifled voice. "If —if you break down, how am I to find

strength? Do you think you suffer less than I do? No, Rex; indeed—indeed you don't; and I am not going back to the life you fancy. I—I could not; so I have made up my mind to tell John everything—everything; and then——"

"Then," he said, "there will be one more burdened heart and broken life. What good can that do, Kate? You won't come to me; and yet you—in a way—divorce yourself from him."

"I know," she said, desperately. "It seems foolish, no doubt, but I must do it. I feel I could not bear the strain of that double life. With all my faults, Rex, I never was a hypocrite."

"No," he said, "I don't think you were. You always spoke out pretty plainly; even when it—hurt——"

I was looking straight at him while he said these words; and suddenly I saw his face turn a ghastly, awful hue.

He staggered and almost fell on to the couch, while, with a little cry of terror, Miss Kate threw herself on her knees beside him.

"Rex, dearest! Oh, Heaven! what is it?" she cried, wildly. "Jane—Jane—come here!"

No need to call me. I was at his side as soon as herself. I saw him raise his hand to his

throat in a bewildered, feeble way, and I tried to unfasten the close-fitting collar. But even as I did so the colour of his face changed, and a shudder ran through the strong young frame.

Then with a cry of more than mortal agony —a cry the like of which I pray Heaven I may never hear again—he fell back on the pillows.

CHAPTER XXVII

FINIS.

EVEN as I tore open the linen shirt regardless of studs and buttons, even as I calmly bade Miss Kate fetch the restoratives that I had used so often for herself, I knew it was all no use.

Rex Tresyllion was dead.

Dead in the promise of his youth, in the flush of fame and success, and though there are no such things as broken hearts according to science, I think his was broken that night—broken beneath the strain of misery, the effort at self-restraint, the long, long penance, the bitterness of endured suffering from which there seemed no escape.

Even now—and all this happened many years ago—I can hardly bring myself to write calmly of that awful night; to speak of Miss Kate's grief.

No; that is too sacred a thing for strangers to intermeddle with. I can't think of it even now with dry eyes.

We sent for a doctor; but he could do nothing. I think he called it "aneurism of the heart," or some such grand name; but what did the name signify? The fact remained the

same. Rex Tresyllion was no more. Life had done its best and its worst for him.

What passed between Miss Kate and her husband I cannot say. I saw him as he left her room, after hearing the whole pitiful story. I could not, if I tried, describe his face, or the look that, for years after, spoke out suffering and endurance in the patient eyes.

I don't think he ever blamed her. Indeed, he could not have had the heart to do it, seeing so plainly her suffering—knowing how she had tried to do battle against the feeling that had been destined to wreck two lives, and spoil one.

They both went to Templecombe before the funeral. But I, being left behind, attended it, unknown, and unobserved. As I lingered for one last look at the spot of earth which held all that remained now of that bright, and handsome, and gifted personality I had known as Rex Tresyllion, I saw a dark, veiled figure approach from behind a group of trees.

Some instinct told me who it was. I moved a short distance away, and I saw a woman stand there beside that open space, till suddenly a paroxysm of grief robbed her of self-command, and she sank down on the damp, cold clay with a despairing, passionate cry, that only the silence of the grave might hear and answer now.

I stole away, softly, and unobserved, wondering a little how it was that memory should suddenly show me, like a lightning flash, that little room in Bruton Street, and the disarray and disorder of glass and china, and the careless grace of a young figure perched upon the table, and looking with laughing eyes at the vexed and handsome face of a woman as he said: "Cross—Pauline?"

Poor Mrs. Cray! I never saw her again, but I know she lives, because of her books; though they changed, like herself, and became gloomy, and serious, and metaphysical; so that I gave up reading them long ago—for I really didn't understand them.

Only a few words more about Miss Kate, and then I can consider my "Confessions," such as they are, are over and done with.

Unlike most confessions, they seem to concern other people a great deal more than myself, but, then, the other people have made up the events of my life, and have shaped, and ordered, and affected it so strongly, that I could not write of it without writing of them.

Miss Kate was never the same after that terrible night. She seemed like one turned to stone. She never cried, or complained; she never spoke of her young lover. She only moved

and looked as if the very springs of her life were maimed and broken, and so I am sure they were.

Mr Carruthers was just as good to her as ever he had been; very patient—very gentle. I don't think he ever said one word of blame, though I could see what a change the knowledge of that story made in his life, and how it aged him by years: for all that, he never reproached, or complained, or was anything outwardly but the kind and genial gentleman the world had always known. But the deepest wounds bleed inwardly; and, sometimes, when I saw his eyes rest on his wife's changed face or heard the broken tenderness of some low spoken words, I knew that he suffered keenly as herself, and like herself, without hope or help.

She tried her best, my poor dear, to take up the burden of duty once more; to play her part in her own home; but month by month and year by year it grew harder, and she drooped and faded, and her strength left her, and everything seemed an effort at last; and so a day came when there was no disguising the truth any longer; when she took to her bed, only saying to me:

"Oh, Jane, I am so tired—so tired."

And that was all. She never complained,

nor seemed ever to suffer any pain, but was just —tired; until one day—three years after her ill-fated lover had died—she just fell quietly back in my arms and, with a smile, the first I had seen on her lips since that awful night looked up in my face and said:

"Good-bye, my faithful old Jane," and—went to meet him.

I don't suppose any one who reads this will care to hear any more about me or my affairs, or I might tell them how Tom came home, ill and repentant, and found me out; and how, woman-like, I forgave him, and lived with him for one troubled, toilsome year, when he, too, went "the way of all flesh," and I was again left alone to battle with life and the world.

But I have never wanted for kind friends, or a helping hand, though I am an old woman now, and find my chief pleasure in looking back at the events of my life, and the stories I have learnt, and the people I have known.

But among them all there is not any story so dear to me, in spite of its sadness, or any memory that I love with such faithful love, as the story and the memory of "Miss Kate."

THE END.

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